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MODERN MASTERS VOLUME ONE:

ALAN DAVIS

...I SAY
THEY'RE MY
BOOTS!



Edited by Eric Nolen-Weathington

Modern Masters Volume One:



MODERN MASTERS VOLUME ONE: ALAN DAVIS

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TwoMorrows Publishing
10407 Bedfordtown Drive
Raleigh, North Carolina 27614
www.twomorrows.com • e-mail: twomorrow@aol.com

Second Printing • October 2006 • Printed in Canada

Softcover ISBN: 1-893905-19-5

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Dedication

*This book is dedicated to my wife, Donna, and my son, Iain,
for their patience and understanding as I spent too many hours alone at the computer
and for their love and support in letting me realize a dream.*

Acknowledgements

The book you hold in your hands has been long in the making and would not have come to fruition without the help and support of the following people:

Alan Davis, not only for agreeing to be the subject of this, my very first, book, but also for investing so much of his time and energy into ensuring this is something we can both be proud of.

Paul Neary, not only for his wonderful contributions to this book, but also for hiring Alan in the first place.

Mark Farmer, for his accessibility, for his enthusiasm, and for being the slickest inker on the planet.

John & Pamela Morrow, for giving a poor production assistant a chance.

Fred Perry, for checking behind me and being a sounding board.

George Khoury, for his generous advice and for spurring me on.

Special Thanks

Lew Stringer

Jon Wiley

Rick McGee and the crew of Foundation's Edge

Russ Garwood and the crew of Capital Comics

Modern Masters Volume One:

ALAN DAVIS

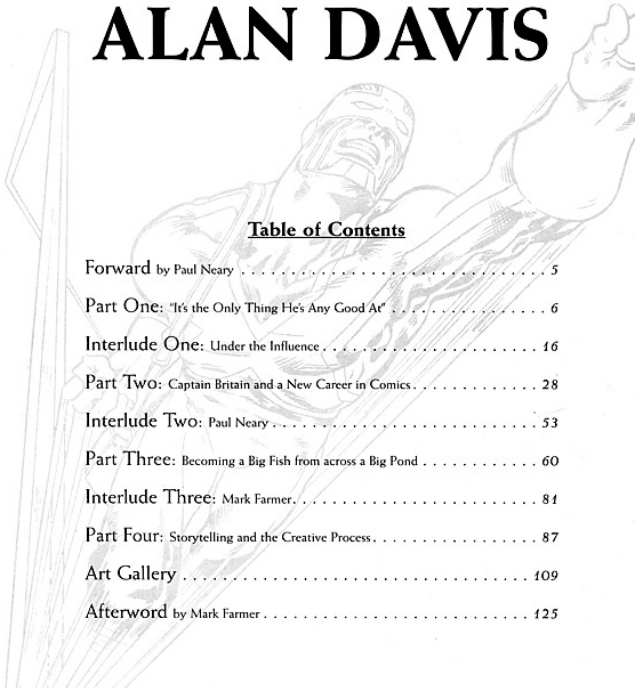
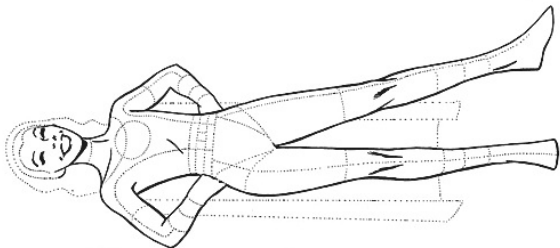
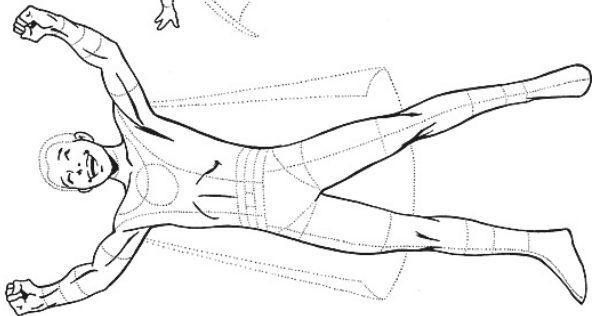


Table of Contents

Forward by Paul Neary	5
Part One: 'It's the Only Thing He's Any Good At'	6
Interlude One: Under the Influence	16
Part Two: Captain Britain and a New Career in Comics	28
Interlude Two: Paul Neary	53
Part Three: Becoming a Big Fish from across a Big Pond	60
Interlude Three: Mark Farmer	81
Part Four: Storytelling and the Creative Process	87
Art Gallery	109
Afterword by Mark Farmer	125



Now you can draw your own Alan Davis super-hero! Alan contributed this activity sheet as part of a DC-sponsored charity project for children's hospitals.



Foreword

I like books like this one... potted histories embodying the high points of the lives and careers of the masters of the comic-book arts. A shelf in my studio bookcase is set aside for them and the collection is coming along nicely... Raymond, Wood, Frazetta, Williamson, Kubert, Morrow, Infantino, Swan....

We may have spent countless happy hours reading comics by our favourite creators but there is a parallel, undeniable thrill in discovering the background details of the creators themselves.

Finding out more about the influences, motivations, goals and insights of the great ones can be sublimely fascinating. Consequently, I am as interested as anyone else in what follows this introduction, but before that I should at least set the scene....

I met Alan in the late '70s, when I was working as Art Director for the newly-formed Marvel UK. He was seeking his first job and I was looking for new talent. Who says there is no God?

Three years or so later I was penciling *Captain America* for Marvel head-office and Alan was penciling and inking *Batman & the Outsiders* for DC. We tried a couple of con-booklet pieces where I finished his preliminaries and we ended up working as a team for several years. Amongst several other awards, we won an Eisner for best art team, a tribute that I value highly to this day.

I (for my sins) went again to Marvel UK (as Editorial Director) and Alan's work was to be graced by the lustrous brush of the gifted Mark Farmer. One of the many books I subsequently released into the US market was Alan's (and Mark's) book *ClanDestine*... a beautiful piece of work that we were lucky to become associated with.

From the sidelines I had always been impressed by Alan's ability to hold his own viewpoint, fight his (and family, friends and workmates') corner, call a spade a bloody great digging implement... and

generally not suffer fools gladly.

As I alluded to earlier, one of the principal values of a book such as this is to reflect the subject's viewpoint on such personal predilections as favourite artwork and career inspirations. It can also, more fundamentally, serve to put a sharper focus on past events. I have sometimes heard this referred to as setting the record straight.

I am happy to see that some of Alan's reminiscences concerning early Marvel UK do indeed cast a slightly more measured and historically correct light upon what actually happened than the diverse claims that have held centre stage until now.

I heartily applaud him for that, for being a good friend, a dependable colleague and, oh yes, for all those great comic-pages... a good number of which are collected in this volume.

The last question is... where on the shelf does it go... ah yes... what about here... somewhere between Gil Kane and Neal Adams, but not too far from Nestor Redondo....

Paul Neary
Surrey, England

Part 1: "It's the Only Thing He's Any Good At"

MODERN MASTERS: Where were you born?

ALAN DAVIS: I was born in England. I never name the town, because it's a small town and I still live about three minutes' walk from where I was born, in what you would call an apartment block. My father still lives across the road in the house where I grew up.

MM: When did you develop an interest in art?

ALAN: I don't know. The easy answer would be, it was always there. But I have given the matter more consideration than might be healthy—because I'm regularly questioned about it—I believe that it was never the art, in and of itself. I was more interested in fantasy and stories and the art sort of came along with that.

MM: Did you watch a lot of movies as a child? Did you read books a lot?

ALAN: I watched lots of movies—and still do—but I was also encouraged to read. My mom was highly educated and very literate. My dad is extremely well read and had also drawn and painted

when he was younger—and returned to art when he retired—and, as an Irish man, he has the Celtic ability for storytelling.

MM: So when you started drawing, were you focused on the storytelling aspect rather than on just drawing pin-ups like most artists start out doing?

ALAN: I wasn't focused. I didn't have any plan or ambition. In retrospect, the thing I think was most significant is I have four brothers and a sister. And my older brother, Gary, is really smart—a real whiz at math and science—and I followed along behind him at school. I was just nowhere near capable of what he was academically. The only thing I could do better than him was draw. Another factor might be that I get hay fever, so I didn't do much field sports. I was alright with gym and swimming and badminton—all solitary pursuits—but field sports were out. Being a loner gave me plenty of time to hone a minor talent into a major obsession. [laughter]

MM: Were there other artists in your family or just your father?

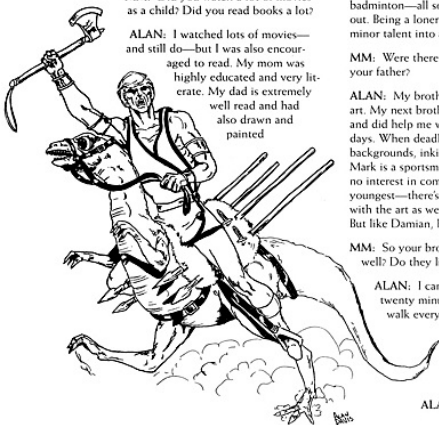
ALAN: My brother Gary was never too interested in art. My next brother Damian is very good at portraiture and did help me with some comic work in the early days. When deadlines were tight he would help me with backgrounds, inking, and coloring. My next brother Mark is a sportsman. My sister Janice is creative but has no interest in comics. My brother Noel, who's the youngest—there's nine years between us—did help out with the art as well, and he is also fairly accomplished. But like Damian, his interest is more towards fine art.

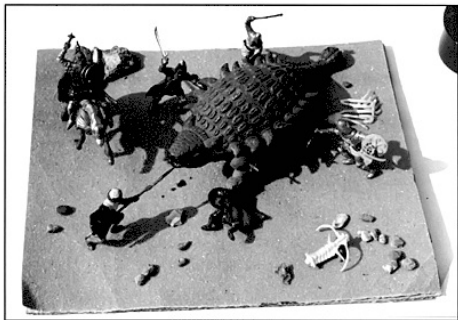
MM: So your brothers and sisters live in the area as well? Do they live nearby?

ALAN: I can walk to their houses within fifteen to twenty minutes. So I've never learned to drive, I walk everywhere.

MM: You said you read a lot as a kid, what sort of things were you reading? You were attracted to fantasy...

ALAN: I think that when you're very





Previous Page: This image was done in Alan's early teens.

Top: Alan: "I made numerous dioramas from my early to mid-teens. I used everything from plasticine and papier-mâché to store-bought toys that I customized and painted. For this scene, from one of my childhood stories, I used 2" tall plastic figures and a self-assembly kit dinosaur. Photo by Ian Huxtable.

Below: Of this bust Alan says, "Sculpture is my favorite art form, so it was logical to sculpt the weird and alien characters I was drawing in an attempt to get an understanding of their three-dimensional form. This model is clay and was about 15" or 16" tall. I was about 21 when I made it. Photos by Damian Davis.

young, books are bought for you and you're encouraged to read a certain type of book. I was fortunate that my parents didn't mind my reading comics—in fact, they took an interest in what I read so they knew I enjoyed fantasy in general and mythological fantasy in particular. I can remember having *The Iliad*, an abridged version for children. I think I was maybe eleven. I'm pretty sure it was given to me because I was enthralled by a strip in *The Eagle* comic called, "Heros the Spartan." I don't know if you've ever heard of it.

MM: No, I don't believe I have.

ALAN: It was set in Roman times, but the stories included a lot of the fantasy elements that are common nowadays but at the time seemed very original. Obviously there were also a lot of science-fiction strips, too. "Dan Dare" is one you may know.

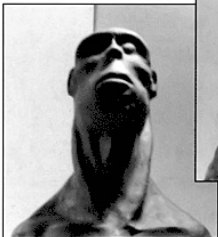
MM: Yeah, I've read some of those.

ALAN: When I was old enough to start buying my own books I discovered all of the usual fantasy and sci-fi classics. Robert E. Howard, Moorcock, and Clark Ashton Smith had a big impact, but Edgar Rice Burroughs' Mars novels and E.E. Doc

Smith's Lensman series were, and are, particular favorites.

MM: You read mostly European books—mainly British, I assume. Did you see much American work?

ALAN: The comics that were produced for children in Britain were *The Dandy* and *The Beano* and that type of thing. They were mostly cartoon strips—one or two pages long. They would be equivalent to the Disney comics or the Harvey comics in style. There were many others,



Right: A panel from Jesus Blasco's "The Steel Claw," one of Alan's all-time favorite British series.

Below: This lovely figure was done in his late teens to early 20s as a text illustration.

Next Page: A title page text-surround.

Steel Claw™ and ©2003
respective owner.

like *The Toffler*, *Beetle*, *Buster*, *Whizzer* and *Chips*, and *Whooper*, but most, if not all, are gone. *The Dandy* and *The Beano* became establishments in Britain and are still on sale now. They were the sorts of comics parents bought for kids. *The Eagle*—which carried "Dan Dare," "Heros the Spartan," and the like—was aimed at a slightly older audience. So too were

The Victor, *Hotspur*, *Valiant*, and *Lion*—all were anthologies, with a mix of war, western, sci-fi, and general adventure strips. These were the comics I was most familiar with in my childhood to mid-teens. 2000 A.D. didn't appear until I was 20.

MM: So when did you start seeing American comics?

ALAN: I was always aware of them, but my town had a very sporadic circulation. I've heard all sorts of rationales, but none of them ever really made sense. Sometimes I would get a comic that was months old, other times I would get a comic that was years old—and they would be delivered to the shop on the same day. So I was seeing odd American comics, but not a regular flow.

MM: So they would come to a local bookstore?

ALAN: Market stalls and news agents. But like I say, there was no regularity to their distribution.

MM: When did you start picking out different artists? When did certain artists start making an impression?

ALAN: I think that was quite late, because a lot of the early comics didn't have credits on them. And even if there were, I don't think I would have taken much notice, because I was more interested in the characters and the stories. I tended to, I suppose, look on comics as something which were captured by the artist and writer, but not actually created by them. I was totally focused on the characters.



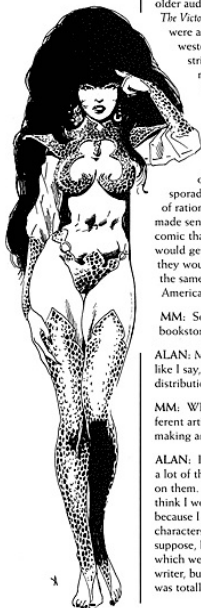
MM: With the British comics, it was much more science-fiction and fantasy than super-heroes....

ALAN: There were some costumed super-heroes, but the majority were classic adventures in fantasy, historic, or sci-fi scenarios. For instance, in "Kelly's Eye," Tim Kelly finds a gem, The Eye of Zoltec, which imparts invulnerability to its wearer. The usual cliffhanger was Tim, in peril, losing The Eye. Other stories were not so formulaic. Some were weird, like "The House of Dolmann," which was about a puppeteer who built an army of mini-robots, each one with a special power. The real twist was the puppeteer supplied the speech and personality for each of the puppets through ventriloquism.

MM: So you've got a guy with multiple personality disorder saving the world.

ALAN: Exactly, but at the time I read the stories I didn't analyze them too deeply. That's why I say a lot of these observations are retrospective. I must say, despite the supposed improvement in production values, the quality of the early British comics has never been bettered. My personal favorite is "The Steel Claw," which was drawn by Jesus Blasco. In this, Louis Crandell lost his hand in a laboratory accident. He was given a prosthetic steel claw which had the bizarre side effect that a jolt of electricity made Crandell invisible—except for the claw. He was basically a secret agent who went around fighting weird scientists and aliens. The artwork was absolutely incredible and made the absurd plausible.

MM: Yeah, Blasco has done some work





here in the US, so I have seen a little bit of his work. Was his name in the credits? Were you able to identify him?

ALAN: No, it was only much later. I don't know if I was maybe a slow developer when it came to those things. I was very aware of good art, and it was almost like I attributed good art to a good story. I didn't separate the artists' contributions until much later, maybe into my teens, and by then I was really getting interested in American comics.

MM: Were you doing much drawing by this time?

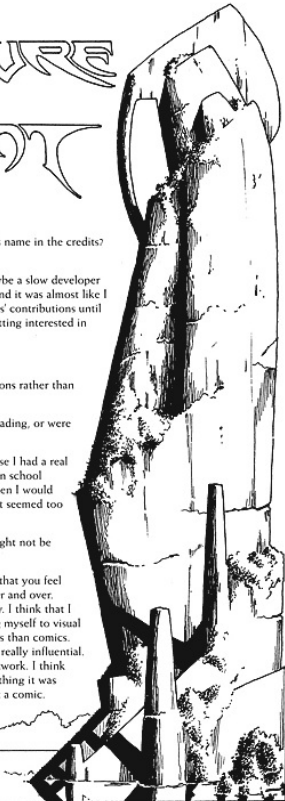
ALAN: I had always drawn, but I tended to do spot illustrations rather than comic strips.

MM: Were you basically drawing the characters you were reading, or were you trying to create your own?

ALAN: A lot of the time I would be creating my own, because I had a real interest in writing stories. It was the one thing I did excel at in school other than art. I would write essays and fantasy stories and then I would draw a spot illustration or two for the key scenes. Comics just seemed too much work. Drawing all those panels—

MM: And some would be boring to draw, something you might not be interested in drawing....

ALAN: That's right. There's a lot of repetition in comics, so that you feel like it would be better to Xerox images and just use them over and over. [laughter] Sticking to a spot illustration seemed the easiest way. I think that I was maybe into my mid-teens before I was seriously applying myself to visual storytelling. By this time I more interested in newspaper strips than comics. There were three or four newspaper strips which were really, really influential. Not just because of the characters, but also because of the artwork. I think when I first started to aspire towards anything it was possibly doing a newspaper strip, not a comic.





Above: The title panel for the "Wolfman of Ausensee" story arc of *Garth*, drawn by renowned British artist, Frank Bellamy—perhaps Alan's strongest artistic influence.

Below: Another of the many fantasy illustrations Alan drew in his teens. **Next Page:** Alan drew a tribute to *Garth* for Bill Storie's fanzine, *The Gopherville Argus* some years ago. As he is wont to do, he pulled the piece back out fairly recently and made a few revisions—this is the revised version.

Garth™ and ©2003 Mirror Group Newspapers/Syndication International.

MM: Were you still writing stories for yourself even after you were done with school?

ALAN: Oh, yeah. I left school when I was 17. I never actually completed a full comic strip until I was working in comics—well, I'm telling a lie there, because I drew a fanzine story for Gary Millidge's *Amon Spek*. That was the only one; I never completed any for myself.

MM: Which of the newspaper strips in particular caught your attention?

ALAN: I don't know if you've heard of *Garth*.

MM: Just from talking with you.

ALAN: *Garth* is basically James Bond, the Eternal Champion, John Carter, and Flash Gordon all rolled into one. He time travels, he goes to different dimensions—it's got everything. And for me it really took off when it started to be drawn by Frank Bellamy. He just gave it a reality that it had never had before. I was completely overwhelmed.

The second was a strip by Syd Jordan, which was called *Lance McLane*. That was a mix of realistic science and Lovecraftian weirdness. He'd done an earlier strip called *Jeff Hawke*, which I really hadn't gotten interested in, perhaps I was too young. *Lance McLane* was set in the future—a post-apocalyptic Earth

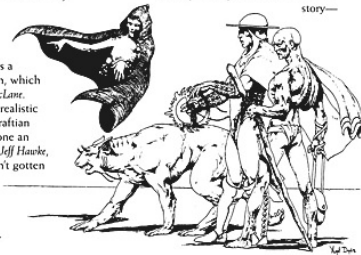
where the only surviving technology was in space. The accuracy and consistency of the science and the attention to detail made it an incredibly believable scenario—it was like adult science-fiction as opposed to a *Flash Gordon*.

The third—and this is more the artist than a single strip, because the artist, John M. Burns, did all three—the stories were non-existent. Just juvenile gags, titillation, and double-entendre. One was *George and Lynne*, the second was *Jane*, and the third was *Girl Talk*. All three featured bare breasts and naked buttocks—usually the women—but so did the daily newspapers that carried the strips. John M. Burns draws the most incredibly realistic anatomy with an airy, expressive style.

MM: Were you trying to, at this point, draw your own comic strips?

ALAN: Yeah, because the comic strip form with just three panels seemed to have such a balance in the design. Frank

Bellamy's title panels for a new *Garth* story—



which would happen two or three times a year—were the real gems. He would letter the title and have some sort of stylized image or combination of images. They were just incredibly memorable pieces.

MM: And these are three panels per daily?

ALAN: Yeah, six days a week—five weekdays and Saturday. They were just black-and-white newspaper strips.

MM: So there weren't any larger strips, like in America with the Sunday strips?

ALAN: No, we didn't have the Sundays at all.

MM: And this would have been the late '60s, early '70s?

ALAN: Yeah, it was around that time.

MM: The adventure strip here in America was starting to die out a bit during that time, and they certainly didn't have any bare breasts....

ALAN: We had a newspaper over here, *The Sun*, which had the Page 3 Girl—a full-page photograph of some model posing topless.

MM: Yeah, the Page 3 Girl is pretty well known here in the US.

ALAN: *Garth* had its fair share of bare-breasted women as well—it was accepted at that time. However, it was the standard of artwork—from John M. Burns, Frank Bellamy, and Syd Jordan—who although credited on the strip didn't always draw it—that inspired me. I believe that between them they produced the pinnacle of British newspaper strips. I cut them out and collected them in scrapbooks, but I would love to see them published properly.

MM: Now, you did an illustration of Garth. What was that done for?

ALAN: A guy in Scotland named Bill Storie produced a magazine called *The Gopherville Argus*. It's basically a fanzine about *Garth*. He wanted to do an anniversary issue and asked me to contribute something. I did an illustration which I later revised.

MM: When did you revise it?

ALAN: It was quite recently. It's just something I did for fun. When I pulled it out, I didn't like what I had done and just messed about with it. I do that a lot!

MM: You said with the newspaper strips that you noticed the anatomy, were you researching anatomy or



taking art classes at that point?

ALAN: I'd started to notice that there were certain artists who excelled at certain things, and there didn't seem to be any artists who had everything. There seemed to be some things that were mutually exclusive. Some artists who excelled at design seemed to draw very wooden figures or not very expressive faces. Other artists drew expressive faces but did very dull designs. So I'd start to break things down and analyze what I liked about each artist.

I should say that during this period I was seeing lots of American comics.

MM: Which ones were you seeing exactly—the Marvel stuff?

Right: As Alan says, nobody draws capes like Steve Ditko. Case in point, this "Dr. Strange" panel from *Strange Tales* #137.

Next Page: Alan put his lessons to use in this illustration of a Celtic Warrior probably done in his early 20s. You know, Alan draws a pretty mean cape himself.

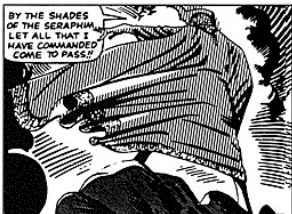
Below: "This panel made me aware of the transition of story and emotion that can be achieved in a single image. Havok and Angel arguing, Cyclops under pressure, confused. Marvel Girl struggling with a mass of contradictory emotions. Neal's art is brilliantly simple, with a powerful immediacy that could never be achieved in text. This is how comics should be—not a static imitation of movies and TV.

Dr. Strange, X-Men™ and ©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.

ALAN: My first regular experience was two "British" titles, *Fantastic* and *Terrific*, which reprinted, in black-and-white, early Marvel stories—*Fantastic Four* and *Thor* and *The Avengers*, etc. There were other parts of the country where original American color comics appeared on a more frequent basis, but my area was not well served. The best source of American comics for me was a market stall. That was because the market moved around, and in the area we had—at the time—an American air base. The airmen were sent American comics from home which they would swap for English comics and books.

I think it would be true to say I saw at least some of almost all of the mainstream American comic titles but never a full run. Fortunately, back then the majority of comics were a complete read. It may have been this infrequency that discouraged me from becoming a serious collector. Every Saturday my brothers and I would visit the market stalls and exchange the comics we had read for others we hadn't. We would each choose our own and share at home.

In the beginning there was *Archie*, *Casper*, *Richie Rich*, etc. Then we got into



because I have a vivid memory of finding *Avengers* #8. It was around that time—early teens—that I started to collect comics. But only particular issues.

MM: Were you able to see a difference from the American style of comics and the British style, if there is a style?

ALAN: I think it was very obvious to anyone with a real interest, because minor facets of differences between different artists become significant with experience. There were some major differences between artists who drew for black-and-white and artists who drew for color, which was one of the things maybe I noticed first. A lot of the American art was

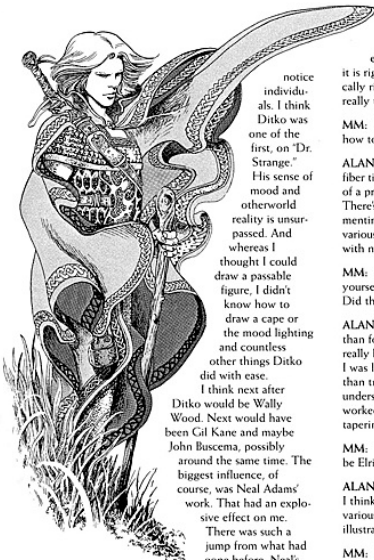
drawn for color and it didn't work as well in black-and-white, whereas—and I think this is part of why I was so enamored with newspaper strips—the artists there understood how to make images work without color and make them very powerful.

MM: Was there any particular artist you were trying to imitate at this time or were you trying to develop your own style...?



the DC books. The 80-pagers were favorites. Somewhere along the way there were reprints of "Captain Atom," *The Fly*, "Jaguar," and *THUNDER Agents*. I can't remember when the Marvel comics came on the scene—it must have been early on

ALAN: When you say "time," we're obviously talking about a span of years— influences are fickle. I think in the first instance I would try and copy just about everything that was put in front of me. And then as I started getting older, I would



notice individuals. I think Ditko was one of the first, on "Dr. Strange." His sense of mood and otherworld reality is unsurpassed. And whereas I thought I could draw a passable figure, I didn't know how to draw a cape or the mood lighting and countless other things Ditko did with ease.

I think next after Ditko would be Wally Wood. Next would have been Gil Kane and maybe John Buscema, possibly around the same time. The biggest influence, of course, was Neal Adams' work. That had an explosive effect on me. There was such a jump from what had gone before. Neal's work seemed to contain

a lot of the strengths of European art and American art at the same time.

MM: So did you decide to take a little bit from here, a little bit from there to make a whole that you liked?

ALAN: I don't think it was as deliberate as that. I looked at things and thought I like the way this artist does this or that, and tried to understand how they did it. It's hard to articulate the process, because you can use a sheet of tracing paper to trace what another artist has drawn, but that doesn't mean that you're going to be able to draw it. You have to understand how the artist got to the end point through a process of working backwards. You look at a comic figure, for instance, compare it to some reference of anatomy, and see how the artist

has interpreted reality. The artist's vision often differs from reality, yet somehow captures the essence—that is the contradiction. If it looks right, it is right—it isn't technically right, it isn't photographically right, but somehow it works. Understanding that is really the problematic part, especially in fantasy art.

MM: What were you drawing with? Were you learning how to ink? Were you exploring other mediums?

ALAN: I would pencil and then ink with a felt tip or fiber tip pen. So it wasn't a case of trying to do something of a professional quality, it was something for myself. There's a lot of unfinished work because I was experimenting. I would draw in Biro, then use watercolors and various other things to imitate effects I had seen, but with no idea of how the professionals achieved them.

MM: So you're using a felt tip pen. Are you saying to yourself, "Well how did he do this with a felt tip pen?" Did that kind of thought cross your mind?

ALAN: I think I was always a little bit more broadviewed than focused. When I looked at an artist's work I wasn't really looking at the individual lines that were being used, I was looking at the accumulation of lines. So rather than trying to reproduce a specific line, I was trying to understand the way that the shapes and structures worked in a totality. I never worried about thickness or tapering of lines and things like that.

MM: There's a drawing you sent me, it looks like it may be Elric, but I'm not sure.

ALAN: Oh, it's just some Celtic warrior. It wasn't Elric. I think it was for some sort of Irish event. I did art for various local events when friends or family would need illustrations for posters.

MM: Oh, yeah? It's a very nice piece.

ALAN: At the time I was using Rotring pens and stippling techniques. I credit Barry Smith with inspiring me in how to handle storytelling, but I also chased down a blind alley trying to imitate his detail. At one point I was doing lots of rendering to hide poor drawing. That image of the barfight was one of maybe 30 or 40 versions.

MM: Really?

ALAN: Not all as finished—but I regularly reworked images over a period of years. I was quite young when I started "The Barfight." As I grew older I looked at it as a challenge to try to come up with some way of handling the complete image. I ended up realizing that it was the technique that was baffling me and I didn't have the patience for it.

Below: Of this illustration titled, "The Barfight," Alan says, "This was one of a number of complex images I tried to create after seeing Da Vinci's sketch for the 'Adoration of the Kings.' I had been looking at a variety of classic art books to see what I could learn and was most impressed by Egon Schiele, Alphonse Mucha, Alma-Tadema, and a lot of Pre-Raphaelites; I still rate John William Waterhouse as my favorite fine artist. So, Barry Smith's Pre-Raphaelite-inspired work had an immediate appeal, and it seemed to offer a technique that was within my limited ability and budget."

MM: That's a pretty complicated scene to be doing 30 or 40 times.

ALAN: Well, I was tracing it through. It's not like I was drawing it from scratch each time.

MM: And you were just changing the way you would finish it.

ALAN: Well, yeah, lighting it in different ways and varying the composition and rendering. It was when I was doing things just for fun. I could do a version in an evening. I always worked very, very fast. I've got a short attention span, so I have to work fast.

MM: Did you ever try to get in contact with any of the British artists you enjoyed?

ALAN: No, I would have been afraid of bothering them. I never considered trying to be an assistant—I really didn't take what I was doing that seriously. One of the things I should explain is that when I was growing up I was encouraged to draw by

my family. I was encouraged to do anything that might be beneficial to my development. So drawing was a good thing. My mother was worried about the fact I would draw ghastly images as opposed to something nice, and she would say things like, "Won't you ever draw me a bunch of flowers?" It was that sort of thing I'm sure every kid goes through. But drawing was recreational. I never, ever felt that I must devote every waking minute to developing a comic style. As a kid I would play with plasticine as quickly as I would draw. When I got older I would be working with clay or carving things as much as I would be drawing. It wasn't like I had an ambition to be a comic artist. It was just a general interest in artistic expression.

When I was at school, I did excel at art but I don't know if that was because art's one of those things that, if you believe you can do it, you *can* do it. You might not be able to do what somebody else does, but you'll be able to do something. Developmentally, I hit a brick wall when I





got to comprehensive school, around the age of 12 or 13. I came across an art teacher who despised comics. He thought comics were the lowest form of art possible, and would try to humiliate me in the class. So I gave up doing art at school and focused on carpentry and technical drawing. I had no further involvement with formal art education until I got to—I think it was about 16 when we were doing our end of course exams. My father asked why I wasn't doing art, and I explained to him about how the art teacher had treated me. I had never told him before. My dad wrote a letter and sent me with it to the headmaster. The headmaster read it over to me: 'My son's an idiot. Please let him take his art exams. It's the only thing he's any good at.' [laughter]

The headmaster let me take the art exam; I passed and went back to school to do an A-level, which was the next stage before going to college. But I was really jaded, because the same art teacher who had treated me so badly was suddenly my best friend because I'd been successful in the exam—better than all of his pet students. I didn't trust him. When I got a summer job and started earning money, I decided that I really didn't want to go back to school. So

I dropped out, met Heather—the girl who's now my wife—and never looked back. So, again, art really took a back seat. Comics took a back seat. Between the time when I left school and when I started working in comics, it really was something which was a bit of fun.

MM: During that time, when you were discouraged and not drawing, were you still reading comics?

ALAN: Oh, yeah, yeah. I mean, when I say I wasn't drawing, I don't mean I wasn't drawing for entertainment. But

it was the end of any formal art education. I felt that the artistic establishment had rejected me, because the official representative of the artistic establishment had basically crapped all over me and told me how useless I was. Although my pride was hurt, I didn't view the rejection as a major life altering crisis.

When I was 17 I hoped to get an



apprenticeship to be a carpenter—that was my real ambition at the time. This is why I say it wasn't like I'd been born knowing I wanted to be a comic artist. I had a real passion for comics, but I was equally interested in making things, carving things, doing anything with my hands. The only reason I didn't become a carpenter is because the year I was due to start an apprenticeship, the local steelworks—which is where most people went to do their apprenticeships—stopped offering the option. That was why I went back to do my A-level in art, just because I couldn't get a carpentry apprenticeship.

This Page: Of this panel from *ClonDestine* #8 Alan says: "As I drew this shot of Adam Destine sliding down the slope towards the aliens I thought that it looked familiar....Of course it was, I had studied it in minute detail along with every other panel in Barry Smith's excellent interpretation of 'The Frost Giant's Daughter'. I tried all sorts of crazy variations to come up with an alternative, but nothing worked half as well as the original. Many action poses become cliché because they best illustrate a particular movement: flying, running, punching, etc. This panel from *Conan* is undeniably the best shot of someone sliding down a snow-covered slope."

Adam Destine™ and ©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc. Conan™ and ©2003 Robert E. Howard Estate.

Interlude 1: Under the Influence

Over the years I have been asked to contribute to various "How to Draw..." books. I have always declined because I am still trying to figure out how to do it myself. I never had any formal art education, but the term "self-taught" simply isn't accurate because I learned by studying and imitating everything I saw. I agreed to do this book on the condition that I could credit the creators who inspired me. Many of them worked when the comics form was in its infancy and created the vocabulary of the medium. In reality there are far too many to mention in this limited space, so I have chosen those who created the most indelible memories or whose influence is still evident in my work.

—Alan Davis

"Heros the Spartan" (1962-65) drawn by Frank Bellamy and "Wrath of the Gods" (1963-64) and "Trigan Empire" (1965-76) by Don Lawrence: "Heros the Spartan" was an historical epic set in the Roman Empire. Unfortunately, it isn't possible to even hint at the quality of the "Heros" art with a spot illustration. The art was fully painted color and each installment consisted of a double page spread at the center of the *Eagle* comic. There was an average of 16 panels across the two pages, each page measuring 13-1/2 x 10-1/4 inches. There were panels within the spread that could stand alone as gems of Bellamy art, but the real power of the strip was in the dynamic layouts and interconnection of the panels which were always read across the entire spread. Sadly, this work has never been collected and I don't believe film of the originals still exists. Paul Holder is currently tracking down all of the original art, which has found its way into private collections, and is making high quality copies in

THIS ACTION-PACKED PICTURE-ADVENTURE STARTS TODAY!

The TRIGAN EMPIRE

Countless millions of miles from Earth was the galaxy of Yarna, in which the planet Elekton was located. The Trigan Empire was the most powerful nation on the planet, and its emperor, Trigo, ruled his people firmly, but fairly. Now Trigo had reached a momentous decision, and he decided to call a mass meeting...



the hope that one day, at the very least, quality samples of "Heros" will be widely available, if not an entire collection.

"Wrath of the Gods" was a mythological epic set in ancient Greece. "Trigan Empire" told the history of an alien world with a culture that was a mix of ancient Earth-like civilizations and super-science.

"Dan Dare" (1960-69) by Frank Hampson: Dan Dare, Pilot of the Future. The stories might seem dated, but the art and design (especially of aliens and alien worlds) will never be surpassed.



Dan Dare: TM and ©2003 respective owner.

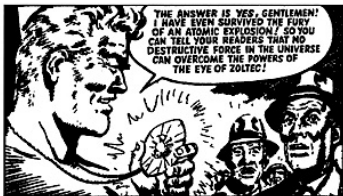
TV21 (1965-69): This magazine had a number of strips based on the Gerry Anderson TV series. As a kid, "Fireball XLS" had always been a favorite, but Frank Bellamy's rendition of "Thunderbirds" made it undeniably the most successful.



Thunderbirds: TM and ©2000 respective owner.

British comics were usually anthology titles, published weekly with strips that ran for one to three pages per issue. The bulk of the strips were printed in black-&-white, only the cover story and/or centerfold were in color. All of the strips listed above featured very high quality hand-painted art, so no black-&-white reproduction can begin to do them justice. Being exposed to so much full-color work gave me an expectation of color that has never been met in modern comics, despite the supposedly superior technology.

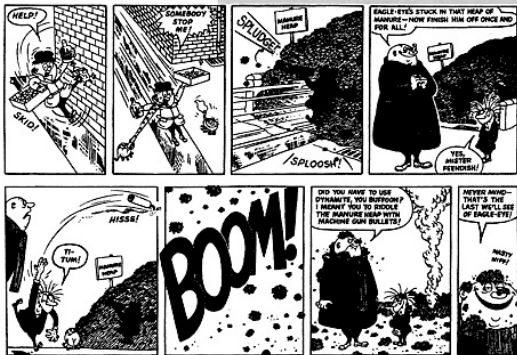
While the color strips inspired me and contributed to a lasting interest in mythology and science fiction, it was the black-&-white strips that most influenced my early attempts at drawing because the techniques were easier to imitate.



Kelly's Eye™ and ©2003 respective owner.

"Kelly's Eye" (1962-71) drawn by Solano Lopez: Tim Kelly discovers the Eye of Zoltac, which imparts invulnerability to the wearer, in an Incan temple.

"Grimly Feendish" (1966-68) by Leo Baxendale: There were many juvenile humor strips but, other than the obvious, this is the one that I remember most. I suppose it is most akin to *The Addams Family*, but with a British twist.



Grimly Feendish™ and ©2003 respective owner.



"Steel Claw" (1962-68) drawn by Jesus Blasco: Louis Crandell, an evil laboratory technician who was fitted with a prosthetic steel claw after losing his hand in an experiment, is involved in another accident that causes powerful electric shocks to make him invisible for short periods, that is except for the claw. After seeing the error of his criminal ways, Crandell becomes a secret agent and fights to protect mankind from evil scientists and alien invasion. It may sound corny but the superb art captured a mood that made it seem more than plausible.



Iron Man™ and ©2003 respective owner.

"The Iron Man" (1963-69):

Robots were always popular in British comics. Robot Archie and Mytek the Mighty might have been the most successful, but this strip was the one that stuck in my mind. Possibly because he was the most human.

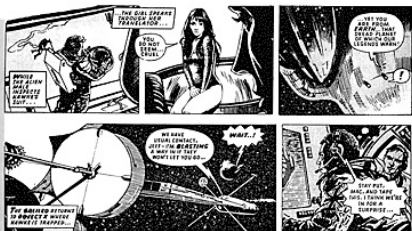


The Guinea Pig™ and ©2003 respective owner.

"The Guinea Pig" drawn by Gerry Haylock: Mike Lane is a volunteer lab-rat who is willing to be the subject of all sorts of mad, and often life-threatening, experiments.

Syd Jordan

Syd Jordan's greatest creation is probably the celebrated *Jiff Hawke* (1954-75) newspaper strip, but my favorite was the *Lance McLane* strip. The mix of plausible science, bizarre aliens, and Lovecraftian occult was fascinating. I really wish someone would reprint it so I could replace the crumbling scrapbooks that contain all of the dailies I collected.



Lance McLane™ and ©2003 respective owner.



George and Lynne, Jane™ and ©2003 respective owner.



John M. Burns

John M. Burns drew three popular strips: *George and Lynne*, *Jane*, and *Girl Talk*. These strips were certainly intellectually undemanding, and not the sort of thing you would want to admit to your mother, girlfriend, or wife that you collect, but John M. Burns' depiction of "real" people is unsurpassed.



Garth™ and ©2003 Mirror Group Newspapers/Syndication International.



Frank Bellamy

The Garth newspaper strip had been in print since July 1943, but when Frank Bellamy took over the art in 1971 I became an immediate fan. Despite the obvious limitations of the strip form, and the lack of color which was seen as the greatest asset of all his previous work, Frank Bellamy's vision and sense of design made every image something to be savored. A particular favorite was the story title panels.





Also included here are examples of Frank Bellamy's spot illustrations for the *Radio Times* magazine. Once again his remarkable sense of design makes what could have been mundane something memorable.

Anyone who wants to know more about all of Frank Bellamy's diverse work should contact Paul Holder at www.frankbellamy.com.



AMERICAN INFLUENCES

Once again there are too many creators who had some effect on my approach to drawing and storytelling—far more than in European comics, in fact—such as Jack Kirby, Wally Wood, Gene Colan, George Tuska, Mike Sekowsky, Mike Ploog, Frank Thorne, Don Newton, Nick Cardy and many more, but they are not among the influences I can still see in my own work.



Steve Ditko

Spider-Man and "Doctor Strange" both had a tremendous impact on me. *Spider-Man* for the energy and movement and "Doctor Strange" for the design and mood. Nobody could draw a cape like Steve Ditko.



Captain Marvel, Dr. Strange, Spider-Man, Warlock™ and ©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.



Gil Kane

I don't think I really need to explain the influence of the superb anatomy and balletic grace of movement Gil Kane imparted to his heroes. After years of seeing wooden super-heroes who "ran" in the air, the characters Gil Kane drew looked how most people imagine flying might feel.

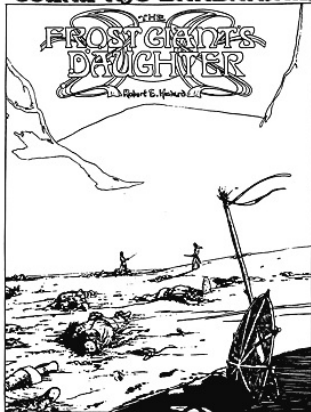


John Buscema

The sheer volume of work John Buscema produced is astounding. The fact that so much of it was extremely high quality makes it even more so. It isn't really possible to single out a particular issue or image, but *Silver Surfer* #4 is memorable to me because it was the first time I recognized the power and grand theatricality of pose and expression that Buscema instilled in every character he drew.



CONAN THE BARBARIAN



sure most artists would have had the trees growing conveniently above the rocks so that Conan could reach them without any effort.

"The Frost Giant's Daughter" was the first time I saw a splash page devoted to establishing an environment, and the entire story remains a particular favorite.

Barry Windsor-Smith

On previous occasions I have apologized for not crediting writers because, as a young reader, I was only interested in the characters and stories. I did start to take notice of artists' styles when I began to realize a good artist always told a good story, but a good writer's work rarely survived a poor artist.

My first real awareness of what was possible in visual storytelling came from Barry Smith's art on "Red Nails." The little three panel sequence where

Conan pulls Valeria onto his knee is a terrific character moment, but what really impacted on me was the panel where Conan cuts branches from a tree. I'm



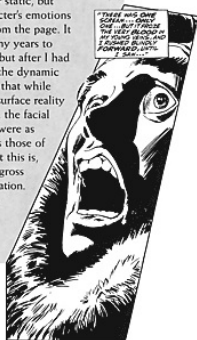
Conan™ and ©2003 Robert E. Howard Estate.



Neal Adams

The opening shot to *X-Men* #56 was the first Neal Adams art I ever saw. I was 13 and completely awestruck. In retrospect, I can understand that, although I was used to seeing illustrative art in British and European comics, this wasn't what I expected from "American super-hero comics." British and European art had always tended to be roughly polarized into the sophisticated,

photo-referenced, "realistic" approach at one extreme with broad, big foot cartooning at the other. In my experience, which was a product of cultural influences and ignorance, super-hero art's dynamism made it fit the cartoon category. *X-Men* #56 challenged this neat oversimplification. Ordinarily photo-referenced faces look dead or static, but Neal's character's emotions exploded from the page. It took me many years to realize this, but after I had gotten past the dynamic action I saw that while there was a surface reality to Neal's art, the facial expressions were as expressive as those of cartoons. But this is, of course, a gross oversimplification. The tip of a creative iceberg.



X-Men™ and ©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.

Part 2: Captain Britain and a New Career in Comics

MM: How did you get involved with comics then? You got involved with the British fanzines....

ALAN: I never even knew of the existence of fanzines or comic conventions until shortly before I began to work in comics. There were so many other things going on in my life that comics were really only a minor interest. I was married when I was 21, and thinking about starting a family—working in comics was something other people did that I could appreciate, but it didn't seem to be something that I would ever be capable of doing.

MM: So you basically sort of stumbled into comics rather than seeking it out.

ALAN: That's right. I sent away to a company called The Edge of Forever, which was run by Mike Conroy—who later became a friend—to order *How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way*. I had seen it advertised and thought it would be interesting just to know how the professionals do it. Mike phoned to say he didn't have

the book in stock, so he could either refund my money or I could wait for the book. I said I'd wait. When the book eventually came, Mike sent some free comics as compensation for the delay. I wrote a note to thank Mike, but a simple "thank you" looked inadequate against Mike's letter—his notepad had a fantastic watermark design of all of the "Hammer Horror" characters drawn by the excellent British artist, Brian Lewis. So, purely to fill up space on my note, I drew a design, then I sent it off and thought no more about it. A couple of days later I got a phone call from Mike asking where I had gotten the notepad. When I told him I'd drawn it he said, "I'd like to get the original." And I said to him, "You're holding the original." [laughter] It was very neatly drawn. Then he asked me if I'd like to contribute to his fanzine, *Fantasy Forum*, which was really just a mail order sheet with a few little news items and a couple of fan sketches. Les Chester, who worked with Mike, had his own fanzine called *Mea Culpa*, which I also contributed to, and through Les I met Gary Millidge, who does *Strangeways* now, but at the time had a fanzine, *Amon Spek*.

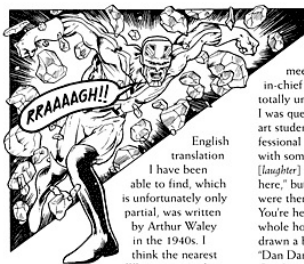
MM: What kind of things were you contributing? Looking over the art you sent me there's a character called Monkey. What is that?

ALAN: Monkey is a character from Asian mythology. He is hugely popular in China and Japan—and, thanks to a Japanese TV series, has a cult following in England. There was actually something made in America quite recently called *The Hidden Kingdom*.

MM: That sounds familiar. When did you first become aware of it? In your teens?

ALAN: It would have been my late teens. I was already into the pre-Bruce Lee flood of Chinese and Japanese martial arts movies. So anything that appeared on TV, like *The Water Margin* and *Monkey*, was compulsory viewing. *Monkey* had a complexity and depth that piqued my curiosity and I started to search for information to its sources. I was amazed at the diversity of material I eventually found. There are books and comics for all ages, as well as movies ranging from children's cartoons to traditional Chinese opera. The original stories, which weave together much older myths and stories, were written by Wu Ch'eng-ên in the 16th Century. The only





English translation I have been able to find, which is unfortunately only partial, was written by Arthur Waley in the 1940s. I think the nearest Western equivalent

to the story content might be Orwell's *Animal Farm*.

MM: Oh, really? How so?

ALAN: The story escapes simple genre classification and can be read on a variety of levels. Superficially, as simplistic yarns peppered with fortune cookie philosophy or as a satirical commentary on Chinese politics and religion with occasional nuggets of genuine insight. I don't pretend to get half the satire, because it is culturally specific, but even so it is a good read.

MM: There are also some fanzine illustrations you did with celebrities costumed as various super-heroes. Did you use still photos when drawing those?

ALAN: I used photographs, definitely.

MM: Were those just actors you liked or was there another reason for those?

ALAN: They were for Mike Conroy's *Fantasy Forum*. I can't remember if it was Mike or Les who came up with the idea of putting in movie and TV personalities as super-heroes. They both suggested names on occasion. I did quite a lot of them.

MM: So how did you get from the fanzines into doing professional work?

ALAN: Les Chester and I corresponded quite a lot, and Les really, really encouraged me. He was one of the most enthusiastic

forces in pushing me to work in comics. Les convinced me to go down to London for a comic convention so I could

meet Paul Neary, who was the editor-in-chief at Marvel UK at that time. I was totally unprepared for what I found. When I was queuing up to meet Paul there were art students all around with their big, professional portfolios, and I had a plastic bag with some drawings stuffed into it. [laughter] I thought, "I really shouldn't be here," but my brothers, Damian and Noel, were there saying, "No, no. Go on, go on. You're here now, you might as well go the whole hog." One guy in front of me had drawn a brilliant pornographic version of "Dan Dare" in Frank Hampson's art style. On the other side of me was a guy who'd painted a Conan story in the style of Frank Frazetta. So I felt really ridiculous when I got out my felt tip drawings and handed them to Paul. But Paul said they were exactly what he was looking for. The colored stuff, though fantastically accomplished, was just too expensive to reproduce. Paul wanted artists who could draw in black-and-white. To cut a long story short, I was eventually asked to do "Captain Britain," and that was it.

MM: So had you built up your name in the local fan scene?

ALAN: No, no, there was no name—

MM: Your work in the fanzines didn't have your name?

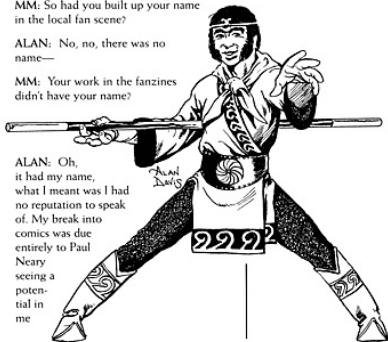
ALAN: Oh, it had my name, what I meant was I had no reputation to speak of. My break into comics was due entirely to Paul Neary seeing a potential in me

Previous Page: The stationery illustration Alan sent to Mike Conroy as part of a thank you note.

Top: A panel from "Rough Justice," *Daredevils* #7.

Below: This image is of the TV version of Monkey—a Japanese production dubbed into English—the hero of a Chinese folk tale and a favorite of Alan's. It was drawn for a fanzine.

Captain Britain™ and ©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc. Monkey™ and ©2003 respective owner.





Top Right: A Lance McLane strip attributed to Syd Jordan.

Below: This Hulk image marked the first time Alan inked with a brush. Alan admits it "got out of control" and he tried to cover up his mistakes by adding more technique. It was used as the cover for the British fanzine *Ogre* #8 published in May 1981.

Next Page: Alan's first published cover. Looking back, Alan says, "Groan. How did I ever get any more work?"

Dr. Strange, Fantastic Four, Hulk, Thor™ and ©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc. Lance McLane™ and ©2003 respective owner.

which I didn't even see in myself. At the time Marvel UK was essentially a reprint house, reprinting Marvel US comics in black-and-white anthology titles. Paul wanted to originate material, but he had had to fight to win even a small budget because the money people were against creating new work when they had so much they could reprint. So Paul was really looking for people who would work for peanuts. [laughter] Somewhere between a third and a quarter of the 2000 A.D. rate at the time, so it was very poorly paid. But everyone involved was very friendly and enthusiastic, and Paul taught me a tremendous amount. He knew a lot about all aspects of the comic business. Paul had worked for Warren from—I think about 18 years old.

MM: Really?

ALAN: He'd done a lot of work for Warren. And going back to the *Lance McLane* newspaper strip, when I first met Paul I commented that he drew very like Syd Jordan, and he laughed because he was living in the same building as Syd Jordan and had drawn a lot of the series for Syd. [laughter]

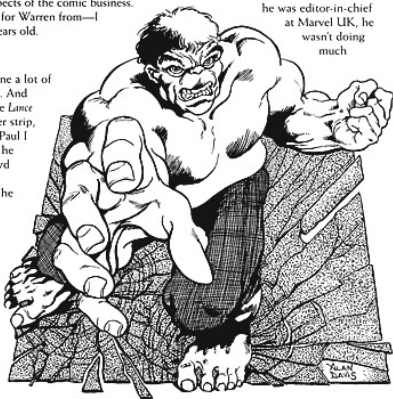
MM: That's funny.

ALAN: Paul was a very

accomplished artist and taught me all of the basic skills and techniques—as well as a good deal of comics history. Paul has a phenomenal comic collection and an equally extensive knowledge of their creators.

MM: He inked some of your early work.

ALAN: No, he inked a lot of my early DC and Marvel work, but that was much later. When Paul was the editor-in-chief at Marvel UK, he was basically looking for other people to originate work. When he left Marvel UK, he went back to drawing at Marvel, in America, and penciled *Captain America* for some years. While he was editor-in-chief at Marvel UK, he wasn't doing much



hands-on work himself, but acting as a sort of mentor to a bunch of people who were enthusiastically prepared to work for very little money.

MM: And how old was he at the time you came in? Was he much older than you?

ALAN: I think he is about seven years older than me. He'd have been in his early 30s.

MM: So he really was someone you could look up to....

ALAN: Well it's not a matter of age, it's a matter of ability. Paul understood the medium from a business level through to the practicalities of how to put a story together, of how to draw, of how to write. But it wasn't like he had a big stick where he was trying to make me imitate him. He would let me make my own mistakes, and then when I'd realized I'd made a mistake, he'd show me how to correct it.

MM: Your first published work there was a cover. You said you drew that same-size?

ALAN: Yeah that was A4 size. I didn't like the idea of working for reduction.

MM: Did you do your second cover same-size as well or had you been told that things were done larger up at the proper size?

ALAN: Paul let me do that first cover at print size knowing it wasn't going to work out very well so that when I saw how bad it was I'd know better next time. *[laughter]*

MM: Then he tossed you in with "Captain Britain." There had been previous "Captain Britain" stories—had

the title lapsed or did you pick up where the continuity left off?

ALAN: Well, this is one of those things where—have you seen the Captain Britain trade paperback?

MM: The one from 1988?

ALAN: No, the one from this year.

MM: Oh, the first stories with Alan Moore. Yes.



ALAN: Yeah, that's a bit unfortunate, because that isn't really where the new "Captain Britain" started.

MM: Right. You started before that. You did a few stories with Dave Thorpe first.

ALAN: That's correct. Nine episodes with Dave and one with Paul. Dave was on staff at Marvel UK as an editor. He wanted to write and I was teamed up with him by Paul. The real groundwork for what "Captain Britain" was to become was already fully planned by Paul and Dave before I was involved. My first contribution was to redesign Captain Britain's costume. The original incarnation, which was drawn by Herb Trimpe—I don't know

if Herb designed the costume—was really a cross between Captain America, Daredevil, Spider-Man and Thor.

MM: Yeah, he had the red costume with the rampant lion emblem.

ALAN: The lion rampant was a real joke in the UK because, although it is a heraldic symbol, it was best known as a sign to denote the quality and freshness of

Below: The first page of Alan Davis art for "Captain Britain" (in *Marvel Super-Heroes* #377) was also the first time Captain Britain appeared in his newly designed costume.

Next Page: Pages two and four from "Friends & Neighbours," the first part of a two-part story.

Captain Britain™ and ©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.

eggs. There were all sorts of jokes about Captain Britain being a "good egg." [laughter] Paul wanted a total redesign so that, visually, Captain Britain would still be an American style super-hero, but with a British sensibility.

Paul gave me a very open brief on designing Captain Britain's look. As I've already said, Garth was one of my favorite characters. So I had the idea of making Brian Braddock like Garth, basically—an exaggerated Greek god, perfect in every way. Michelangelo's David on steroids. The irony—or the gag—was that while Captain Britain looks like he's the great super-hero, he's...

MM: ...not very confident in himself.

ALAN: Pretty useless in fact! I decided to base his costume on military uniforms. If you've ever seen the mounted guards outside Buckingham Palace, you'll recognize the components. The white leggings and the tall boots with the flaps over the knees were easy. The headgear took more time because I wanted it to look more like a helmet than a mask. The stripes across his chest started as two crossed sashes and underwent numerous changes. Some of the unused concepts and variations appeared on other Captain Britain Corps members.

MM: You didn't have Captain America on your mind when you were designing the basic structure of the costume?

ALAN: No. I was trying to be as different from Captain America as possible. They're both patriotic heroes, both characters are wrapped in the flag, but that's really where the similarity ends. Captain Britain is really rigid, the way that he stands, the way that he moves around. He's totally humorless and he's not competent for the job he's been chosen to do, whereas Captain America was the embodiment of heroism.

MM: Well I certainly think the new costume was much better if only because it stood out more.

ALAN: I think good design is about identifying the specifics or minor details that suggest—often subconsciously—major or significant aspects of the character involved. I'd always thought there was an element of militarism in the Silver Age Green Lantern costume simply because of the high neck and white gloves, whereas Captain America—though clearly a patriotic icon—has the line and silhouette of a costumed adventurer.

MM: How was it working with Dave Thorpe in those first stories? This is your first time seeing a comic in script form, right?





ALAN: Yeah. In the first instance I felt way out of my depth. I really didn't know what I was doing. That's why Paul was so crucial.

MM: Was this done Marvel style or full script?

ALAN: It was full script, but there was still a lot of latitude, because Paul was treating both Dave and I as beginners and we were both learning as we went along. But what we lacked in ability or skill we made up for in enthusiasm and effort. And so I would spend more time working on breakdowns and the first draft of a page than I would maybe spend on four or five pages nowadays.

MM: How long did it take you to finish that first story?

ALAN: I honestly couldn't tell you. It was so long ago. I just know that it was important that I get it right. I'd show Paul the pencils and ask what I should I change before I'd start inking it up. Once that first one was finished it was a case of getting into a routine to meet deadlines.

MM: Those were five page stories mostly?

ALAN: Yeah.

MM: Didn't you and Dave have some problems at one point?

ALAN: Dave and I ended up having a difference of opinion about politics in the stories.

MM: Right. It was *Marvel Super-Heroes* #384, I believe. "Friends and Neighbours," the one that takes place in Ireland.

ALAN: Yeah, I just thought it was inappropriate to have a guy dressed in the Union Jack flying over to Ireland and sorting out the entire Northern Ireland situation. The problems are a little bit more complicated than can be handled in two five-page stories.

MM: Can you go into the story a little bit? It was reprinted in *X-Men Archives Featuring Captain Britain*, but the story was changed so much...

ALAN: It was just one of those really, really silly political things. Dave wanted to do the story and I didn't. Bernie hadn't been an editor for long and Dave was on the staff, so I expected to lose the argument and my job. But, editorial and management agreed that the story was inappropriate and Dave was told he had to change his



Above: The last two pages from the "Friends & Neighbours" two-part story. The last page (on the right) was actually scripted by Alan Moore setting up his first story-line in the series.

Next Page: Pencils from an unused cover for Doctor Who.

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script. Time passed. The deadline and Christmas holidays approached. By the time I received the revised script, the offices were closed for the holiday and the art was to be finished when they reopened. I was stunned when I read the revision, which was now meant to be a fantasy fable, because it was exactly the same as the original script with the names anagramized.

MM: So it's still blatantly obvious what he's saying.

ALAN: Well Belfast became Fablest, the Protestants became Rottenpasts, and the Catholics became Coalitch. The Rottenpasts were orange growers and Coalitch were potato growers. This is when I got angry because I was insulted that anyone might think I couldn't see through something so transparent. I phoned Bernie who was spending Christmas in Paris. Bernie's biggest concern was that, if we miss this issue, we wouldn't get to do another one once the money people see that we couldn't meet a dead-

line. Over the phone it was decided that our only option was to remove the politics, even though it left little else. I drew the entire issue in two days, that was pencil and inks. And it's the most horrible job I ever did. It was a disaster, one of those things that shouldn't have happened.

MM: So the editors tried to make peace, but were basically of the same mind as you were, yes?

ALAN: Well, yeah. I was quite prepared to walk away and never work in comics again rather than draw the story the way that it was. But it was Dave who lost out... which I sincerely regret. Dave could have been celebrated as one of the more experimental and dangerous comics writers. If he had been working for Vertigo he would have been applauded for what he was doing.

MM: A little ahead of his time perhaps?

ALAN: Yeah, and I was really coming from the old school comics, where I wanted to do something that was safe and aimed at children. Dave wanted to do something radical and sensationalistic.

MM: Of course he gets replaced by Alan Moore who does that same kind of thing.

ALAN: Not really. Dave was into political satire. Although Alan was heavily into the Stephen King style—dark themes—his stories were always entertaining and never got bogged down with social relevance and political commentary.

MM: And Alan actually wrote the last page of that story? Was that unusual?

ALAN: Yes. I don't really know how it came about. The impression I was given was that Alan asked for it. He didn't want to have to tie up the loose ends of Dave's run in his story. He wanted to change the status quo, but not in what he saw as his stories.

MM: Since "Friends & Neighbours" was so close to deadline, did Alan writing a page help speed things up?



ALAN: Bernie had asked me to write a fill-in, "The Binary Beings," to avoid further deadline crises. So the second part of "Friends & Neighbours" should have been on a better deadline, but I don't think it actually was.

MM: Were you doing other things for Marvel UK or were you strictly focused on "Captain Britain"?

ALAN: Primarily I was working for Marvel UK, but I did try to get work from 2000 A.D. At the time there was no *Warrior*; it hadn't started up. There wasn't really any other venues for me to get work from other than 2000 A.D. But I was quite happy just doing "Captain Britain," because at that time I had a regular full-time job and the "Captain Britain" was just a bit of extra money I made over the weekend.

MM: So Paul Neary was replaced by Bernie Jaye. What was she like? People know who Paul Neary is, but they probably don't know Bernie's name.

ALAN: Oh, Bernie was great. I don't think she had been a comic fan, but she really cared about quality and did her best to improve production values and to increase our rates. She was always really straight and, unlike many editors of the time, she didn't see the job as a way into writing. Bernie just wanted to be a good editor, and she was.

MM: How many people worked at the Marvel UK offices? It was a pretty small operation?

ALAN: Yeah, I honestly couldn't say how many. I rarely went down to London, but it was a very small operation.

MM: And even though there were now original features, they were still mostly repackaging the older US comics as reprints?

ALAN: Yes. There was the *Doctor Who* magazine which had a *Doctor Who* strip. I think Paul had a number of other series in mind. I remember Mick Austin—who might be best known for the excellent *Warrior* covers he painted—also started a strip for Marvel UK, but it failed. *Captain Britain* was the only thing that continued.

MM: How did the work for *Quality* and *Warrior* come about?

ALAN: Garry Leach was finding it difficult to meet the deadlines on "Marvelman." Garry was a real perfectionist and he poured his heart and soul into every page he drew. I was asked to do a couple of fill-ins and give Garry a break. It was flattering to be asked but also very nerve-wracking. I would be happy to draw two pages of pencils and inks a day and Garry would take two or three weeks on a single page. I wasn't really sure about



how well I would be accepted as a stand-in. And I certainly didn't consider it a long-term commitment.

MM: Had you met Alan Moore yet? Had he taken over "Captain Britain" before you agreed to do "Marvelman"?

ALAN: It was all sort of around the same time. It's splitting hairs to say which came first.

MM: They had to have been within a month or two of each other.

ALAN: Possibly. "Captain Britain" had been going for about six months before *Warrior* came out. I only have very, very vague memories of when I first met Alan. It was certainly at the Westminster Mart, because that was the popular venue and Dez Skinn was there, Garry Leach might have been there, and Paul Neary was involved. At the time I was meeting so many new people that it's all a bit of a blur.

MM: Had you known Dez Skinn before, since he'd worked at Marvel UK?

ALAN: No. Dez had left Marvel UK long before I got there.

MM: Had you heard of him, or did he just come out of the blue?

ALAN: I'd heard of Dez, unfortunately nothing good. I don't know if he deserved the reputation. He was a businessman and, as is often the case, most creators despise businessmen. I didn't really ever get to know Dez very well, because, rightly or not, I regarded him as someone that I should keep at arm's length. Having said that, I feel that everyone who was involved in *Warrior* owes Dez a real debt of gratitude, because if *Warrior* hadn't been produced I don't think the so-called "British Invasion" of American comics would have happened.

MM: It probably would have been delayed if nothing else.

ALAN: Yeah.

MM: What were the differences of working with Alan Moore on "Captain Britain" as opposed to with "Marvelman"? With "Captain Britain" you had a little more influence in the storyline, correct?

ALAN: I never intended to get involved in the "Marvelman" continuity, because as far as I was concerned I wasn't going to be staying on for any length of time. It soon became apparent, though, that Garry had decided to drop out completely and that I would be required for a longer term. I said I'd stay with "Marvelman" for as long as I could manage to do both it and "Captain Britain." Remember, at this time I was still doing a full-time regular job and it brought my comic workload up to something like 14 to 16 pages a month.

MM: Was there a different approach to the scripts with "Marvelman" as opposed to "Captain Britain"?

ALAN: Alan and I discussed things so much that, to a degree, the scripts were only a percentage of what the story was about. On "Captain Britain" I knew where the story was going and where it had come from and there was often a certain amount of negotiation on the script. But with "Marvelman" I would always defer to Alan. I usually wasn't much more than a sounding board in any discussion on "Marvelman." Alan had choreographed a deliberate pace and rhythm between the text and art, so post-script changes were never more than simplifying an image or adding some visual interest, but nothing more than

that. On the whole all I had to do was realize Alan's vision.

With "Captain Britain" I had very definite ideas about what we should be aiming for, and initially it was very collaborative. There may have been a degree of competitiveness or conflict, but only in the most positive way. The exchange of ideas was invigorating and ultimately created a richer reality. My most significant influence regarding the storytelling on "Captain Britain" grew from my concerns about the density of incidence and volume of text. Eight- to ten-panel pages, each containing between two to six lines of typed script—which can be seen in the first few episodes—leave very little room for the art. My solution was to turn an artboard on its side and divide it into two slightly larger than print size pages. This allowed me to spread the art—and more importantly the text—across twice the area with the obvious benefits in the overall dynamic appearance. Effectively I was drawing two pages for

the price of one—which may seem like insanity when we were already on bargain basement rates, but this really was a situation of doing the work for the love of it. Beginning with the episode, "A Rag, a Bone, a Hank of Hair," each installment was commissioned and scripted as eight pages, but I expanded some episodes to as much as 13 pages. You can usually spot the print-size pages, in the episodes that have more than eight pages, because they are splash images or pages with fewer panels. Alan dramatically slowed the pace of stories with the "Candle Light Dialogues" episode, so I didn't need to draw extra pages until the second last episode of Alan's run when everything was wound up.

MM: You were still designing supporting characters in "Captain Britain," right? Did you have a hand in creating any of those characters, like the Special Executive or the Crazy Gang?

Previous Page: Splash from "Marvelman," in *Warrior* #2.

Below: In the page on the left, Captain Britain meets the Special Executive. Some of these characters previously appeared in the pages of *Doctor Who*. This page was drawn at just slightly above print size for expediency's sake. The page on the right features the first appearance of the Crazy Gang, as created by Dave Thorpe and Paul Neary.

Captain Britain, Crazy Gang, Special Executive™ and ©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc. Marvelman™ and ©2003 respective owner.



ALAN: Well the Crazy Gang were created by Paul Neary and Dave Thorpe. Jim Jaspers, who was part of the Crazy Gang, went on to be the major villain, all the supporting characters—Saturnyne, Jackdaw, etc.—were created in concept by Dave and Paul. Alan had created the Special Executive concept in a back-up story in the *Doctor Who* magazine. Wardog had been there and I think Cobweb had been mentioned, I'm not sure about Zeigeist. What I did was redesign those characters and then design a bunch of other aliens—Fascination, Legion, etc.—to just hang around in the background to make it look like there was an army. Later some of those aliens got names and powers and became more involved. Slaymaster, The Vixen, and Mastermind had all been in the original Claremont/Trimpe stories, so the first significant character Alan and I co-created was The Fury.

MM: Not long after you started working on "Marvelman" you got the call from 2000 A.D. saying they have work for you....

ALAN: It wasn't as straightforward as that. I had met the editors on a number of occasions but they essentially pigeon-holed me as an American-styled super-hero artist who wasn't ever going to work for them, because at that point 2000 A.D. just didn't want that sort of artwork in their pages. Some time later Richard Burton, who had worked at Marvel UK, asked

me to come over and show my more recent work at 2000 A.D.

A lot of these things coincided, so it's hard to be sure of the specific order of events, but it was shortly after I entered comics that Dave Gibbons, Brian Bolland, Mick McMahon and Kevin O'Neill left 2000 A.D. to work in American comics. So 2000 A.D. was basically losing their four star artists and were looking for replacements. Richard Burton asked me in; Robin Smith was the art editor. Richard and Robin convinced Steve McManus, the editor-in-chief, to hire me. The first job they gave me was "Harry 20 on the Highrock."

MM: I don't know if that's ever been reprinted in the US. What was the basic storyline?

ALAN: The High Rock was a prison satellite; Harry was prisoner number 20. It's essentially *Escape from Alcatraz* in outer space. It was to be 21 five-page installments. I was going to be doing half of it; John Watkiss was to draw the other half. Now the crucial thing was that by accepting this job, I would have enough work to afford to give up my day job, because I was already doing 16 pages a month. Half of "Harry 20" would be around another ten pages, bringing me up to about 26 pages, pencil and ink, a month. Then John Watkiss dropped out. He



dropped out in stages though. Originally, I was to start on chapters three and four, but John was late on chapters one and two, so I was asked to draw one and two. Then John wasn't able to do five and six. In the end I did all 21 episodes on my own, plus occasional covers and posters. I was producing over 36 pages of pencils and inks per month.

MM: Did you look at the 2000 A.D. job as a high-profile assignment?

ALAN: It was security, because 2000 A.D. were publishing all new material. Marvel UK was a reprint house that was struggling to pay for a few pages and the editors had no support from their management. Quality was an independent company which seemed rife with petty politics and was bound to go pop sooner or later.

MM: When you got the "Harry 20" assignment, did you think, "Now I can make it as a comics artist"? Did that secure it for you?

ALAN: No, I was scared to death. I started working in comics part-time about four months after my son Thomas was born. By the time I started working at 2000 A.D. my daughter Pauline had been born. So I was no longer the free spirit; I had responsibilities. That's why doing 36 pages of pencils and inks a month, although not practical, seemed a necessity. I had to make sure there was some financial safety net should things go wrong. I had given up a secure job with seniority, holiday pay, and sickness benefits to speculate as a freelancer. My Mum—who didn't live to see me achieve anything with art—gave me the confidence to believe in myself, but I was never ambitious. I got into comics through

sheer luck, not judgement. I know now that I made the right decision, but at the time it was very scary. I really let my wife,

Heather, make the final decision, but she knew it was something I wanted and gave me her absolute support, then and ever since.

MM: Now you're doing three different strips for three different companies. As soon as "Harry 20" is over you start working with Alan on "D.R. & Quinch."

ALAN: Again, it wasn't as straightforward as that. What happened was, previously I had been categorized as the American-style super-hero artist, then after "Harry 20 on the High Rock," I was categorized as the gritty, realistic artist. [laughter] Alan

had submitted a few scripts to 2000 A.D. for the "Future Shock" series that hadn't been taken up by any artists, for one reason or another. One was "The Hyper-Historic Headbang." I had been told—and I don't know if this is apocryphal—two other artists hadn't been able to understand what it was about.

MM: Wow!

ALAN: So the "in" for me working with Alan at 2000 A.D. was that another artist was too lazy to read a verbose script. I think the 2000 A.D. editor's reluctance to let us work together was understandable. The UK comics industry was very, very small, and by that time "Marvelman" and "Captain Britain" had growing reputations;

Previous Page: Two pages from "Harry on the High Rock," which turned out to be a much bigger job than Alan initially anticipated.

Left: Marvel-D.R. and Captain Quinch were drawn for a fanzine during the time Alan was working on all three strips.

Below: When Mick McMahon left the "Slaine" strip, Alan was asked to step in. Writer Pat Mills wasn't sure exactly what he wanted, so Alan drew up this illustration as a starting point. Alan moved on before things were finalized.

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Above: From the first part of the ongoing "D.R. & Quinch" series.
Right: The "grittier, more realistic" original design for D.R. & Quinch.
Next Page: One of Alan's spot illustrations for the "Night Raven" text feature.

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Alan and I had won awards which gave us a high profile. So 2000 A.D. was reluctant to see personalities taking over.

MM: Was 2000 A.D. the only one to feel that way? Did Marvel UK or Quality have any qualms about the Alan Moore/Alan Davis team working for two other companies? Up until the mid-to-late '70s, the American companies frowned on working

for the competition to the point where artists would use pseudonyms. Was there any additional pressure from the editors?

ALAN: Every editor said the same thing: "Make sure you do our work first. Our work's a priority."

MM: What was it like changing gears to work on a humor title like "D.R. & Quinch"?

ALAN: Initially "D.R. & Quinch" was intended as a one-off "Future Shock" and the editor didn't want it in a humor style because 2000 A.D. had two humor strips running. There were a lot of contrary demands on that first story. Everyone envisaged something different. I didn't know that Alan had based the strip on the movie *O.C. and Stiggs*. I had never seen it.

MM: I've never seen it either.

ALAN: Well I'd seen *Animal House* and I thought it was based on that in a generic sort of way and after having been dubbed the gritty, realistic artist I conversely wanted to prove I could draw other styles of art. I think Steve McManus had focused on something in Alan's character description about bikers and vicious looking aliens so he expected something "gritty and

realistic." But since "D.R. & Quinch" was a single "Future Shock" it didn't seem like it was going to be a big problem to go "big foot." Having said that, the first "D.R. & Quinch" was in a more rendered style as a compromise to "gritty realism." The regular series became far more cartoony. This was partially for fun, but on a practical level it was the only way to approach the degree of psychotic violence in the stories.

MM: So it's in a somewhat simpler style than your other work as far as the linework.

ALAN: Well, these are all superficial considerations. I'd always drawn "Captain Britain" as Marvel style artwork. With "Marvelman" I tried to adapt some of the rendering and tonal effects that Garry Leach had used. It didn't really feel natural to me, but it was the only concession I could make to give my art a superficial link to the work Garry had done. I wasn't referencing photographs and I wasn't anywhere near as technically accomplished as Garry.



"D.R. & Quinch" was more of a philosophical change. I was trying to do something which was grotesque big foot cartooning in the tradition of Leo Baxendale's "Grimly Feendish."

MM: Did you have much input in the scripts or the general story-lines?

ALAN: No, like I said, Alan and I would sit down and talk before we did anything, but then Alan would write up the script. There were occasional times where I would change minor things as I experimented and tried to push the envelope. The inherent freedom and flexibility of the cartoon style creates all sorts of opportunities on the page. Like having Quinch break the fourth wall, as John Belushi did in *Animal House*, looking out at the reader in desperation or shared humor. This kind of thing didn't alter the story so it is more an addition than a change.

MM: It's been reprinted here in the US more than once now. In fact I think "D.R. & Quinch" was the first of your British work available in America. I believe the first reprinting was done in '85, not long after you started on *Batman and the Outsiders*. It was available long before your work in "Captain Britain." How do you feel about your work on "D.R. & Quinch" in retrospect?

ALAN: When I look at all my old work I wonder what the hell was going through my head. [laughter] I thought I was doing the best I could, but now I look at it and think it's incompetent. I wonder what has changed about my perceptions or intelligence that can make something seem totally alien. [laughter]

I was fortunate to serve my apprenticeship in print and make money out of almost everything I drew. But that also means the entire catalogue of my mistakes and disasters has been preserved in print and is out there to haunt me. [laughter]

MM: After "D.R. & Quinch" ended you started doing the illustrations for the "Night Raven" stories. How many illustrations would you do for each story? Was it a one-page text story with one illustration or were they longer than that?

ALAN: I think it was two pages but it was usually



padding out by printing my illustrations which were intended as column panels, as full pages, or even double-page spreads. This was another thing Marvel UK wanted on a budget. I inherited the assignment from Paul Neary. Although he wasn't an editor then, he still drew occasional illustrations. Paul was working in an old-fashioned way, drawing at enormous size with a huge brush and just lathering on the ink and really enjoying the sensation of the broad strokes and creating inking effects. When I took over I just tried to imitate that on a small level and wasn't tremendously successful. In fact, I think I did some real rubbish. But it was always a rush—and this isn't an excuse—it's just the reality of the situation that it had to be done quickly and cheaply.

MM: Did you reference your newspaper strip influences at all for these?

ALAN: No, I'd draw a regular comic image and do some scratchy inking on it. [laughter] Again, these are superficial considerations. One of the most important things Paul Neary taught me was to be disciplined about producing a page a day. It was the key to being professional and meeting deadlines. As things turned out I often had to do a page-and-a-half a day. Sometimes as many as three. It was a very, very fast rate of work, but I was in a position where I had no choice if I was to be a pro and to meet my responsibilities as a husband and parent. They were my first consideration. I was doing a

Below: Alans Moore and Davis along with letterer, Steve Craddock—the “three cringing, blubbering men”—bid a fond farewell to their editor, Bernie Jaye.

Next Page: An early appearance of Betty Braddock from *The Daredevils* #5—drawn at slightly above print size—along with Captain Britain taking on Slaymaster from *The Daredevils* #4.

Betty Braddock, Captain Britain, Cobweb, Slaymaster™ and ©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.

job that I loved and I was enjoying that job and working very long hours doing that job, but at the end of the day I didn't have time to reconsider what I was doing. The first shot was the only shot and was what was sent in to the publisher.

MM: So after “D.R. & Quinch” were you offered regular work from 2000 A.D.?

ALAN: I don't think any artist ever had regular work at 2000 A.D. The editors liked to rotate the artists to suit the style of the various strips.

MM: So for the next year or so you're still working with Alan Moore on “Captain Britain” and “Marvelman.” Then Alan quits “Captain Britain” because—as he states in *Kimola: The Miracleman Companion*—Bernie Jaye was fired. What happened there?

ALAN: Well, first of all, Bernie wasn't fired.

MM: Really?

ALAN: Yeah, Bernie was absolutely not fired. She was really good at her job and she chose to leave. Bernie would be very, very offended if she thought anyone believed she was fired. Bernie's a very free-spirited person. She enjoyed the job she was doing as an editor, but she had other interests and she moved on.

MM: So it was just a matter of her finding something else she wanted to do?

ALAN: There were a lot of things Bernie was interested in and she'd achieved what she'd wanted to do in comics as an editor. She decided she'd basically had enough. There wasn't any big problem. It was a very calm and considered decision.

If you look in *Daredevils* #11, which was published in November '83, you'll see that it contains a little comic strip which says goodbye to Bernie—drawn by me and written by Alan Moore. It was a sort of thank you for all the protection and help that she'd given us over that period of time.

MM: Now Alan was writing “Captain Britain” up until June '84.

ALAN: Right. Bernie left in November of '83 and Alan left in June of '84. I don't think I need to say any more.

MM: And he started writing *Swamp Thing* in January '84. I had always just assumed he was moving over to the American comics where there was a lot more work and for better money.

ALAN: That's right, DC Comics had continued to headhunt British creators, and Alan was made an offer about a year before I was. But that was only one of a





Above: Another illustration from the Jamie Delano-authored "Night Raven" text series.

Next Page: Alan drew this image for the cover of the French fanzine, *Score*.

Captain Britain, Meggan, Night Raven™ and ©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.

our ownership without Marvel's permission, Marvel couldn't reprint without our permission. Our creative ownership was, at best, a lever to negotiate a rate that would compensate us for the far below standard rate we had received when we originally produced the work.

I was prepared to create new material on "Captain Britain" under a work-for-hire contract because a condition of the new agreement was to raise the page rates to parity with 2000 A.D. and it also guaranteed the same creator rights recognized by Marvel US—and DC. It seemed reasonable to me because although there were no formal contracts at 2000 A.D., it was assumed that IPC bought absolute rights to everything they published, such as "D.R. & Quinch." And all of the British creators who sought work in America were more than happy to accept DC's work-for-hire contract.

MM: So you're kind of left in the lurch, you have an issue to put out....

ALAN: Yeah. I had expected Alan to move on, but the way it happened was a surprise. The first I knew of his decision to leave "Captain Britain" was when I received a phone call from Tim Hampson. Alan was in dispute with Marvel's accounts department over unpaid invoices. I spoke with Alan and told him that I felt Tim was doing his very best and, since I had never had any problems with the Marvel accounts department, I was prepared to accept there had been a genuine mistake. The next script was already overdue so Tim asked me if I could take over as writer when Alan left. I agreed to fill in until another full-time writer could be found.

MM: You didn't particularly want to take over the writing chores?

ALAN: I did, but I didn't think I'd be capable of doing it. I was worried I'd make a fool of myself.

MM: Well I think you did a pretty good job, particularly under the circumstances.

ALAN: As well as that, Alan had asked me, as a favor, to take Jamie Delano on. At the time he was trying to get Jamie work.

MM: And Jamie had already taken over "Night Raven" for Alan a bit earlier.

ALAN: That's right, yeah. It was basically keeping it in the family.

MM: You were already familiar with Jamie I assume.

ALAN: No, I hadn't met Jamie 'til shortly before working with him. There was an occasion where Alan had come over to my house with Jamie. I'd taped an episode of a TV program Alan had missed—Alan Bleasdale's *Boys from the Blackstuff*, the final episode. Alan sat and watched that while Jamie and I talked about what "Captain Britain" was and where it might be going.

MM: Did you have a fairly close meeting of the minds as far as story direction?

ALAN: Not really. I accepted Jamie on Alan's recommendation. I think that Jamie

is a capable writer, but I don't think he had any interest in the super-hero genre. More Clive Barker than Roy Thomas. I hoped things would improve in time. Jamie was in an impossible situation because he was the junior partner and having to prove himself every step of the way. There were certain stories I wanted to do. So in the beginning I would outline a plot and he would then write the full script. If it deviated from my plot I would change it back to what I thought it should be.

In my defense I should explain that Tim had accepted Jamie partly on my recommendation and I had given Tim a verbal description of what to expect in the long story. It was a very awkward situation. I know I gave Jamie a hard time.

MM: When Jamie comes on "Captain Britain" is relaunched in its own title as the lead feature—

ALAN: This is why I say that sales weren't an issue. "Captain Britain" had been doing better than it ever had.

MM: You did the covers for the new series. I assume you colored them yourself?

ALAN: Yes.

MM: Was that a nice chance for you to experiment a bit? Did they take a long time to do?

ALAN: I'd painted some posters previously, dreadful things. I'd never had any training in how to use color or the materials. Dr. Martin's dyes, gouache, and watercolor board was the standard then. I experimented, learning on the job. I didn't really want anyone else to do them, because I was very protective about doing anything with Captain Britain. Just the fear of someone better coming along and stealing the gig. [laughter]

MM: You can see a real development in your style at this point with the new monthly. Were you putting forth a renewed effort or were things just really coming together?

ALAN: Things were coming together. Producing 36 pages a month taught me a lot. Also the page rates increased so I could afford to do less. It's a common mistake to assume that all the episodes, all the pages were drawn with the same amount of time and dedication and at the same level of stress. One might be rushed because the plot or script is late or it might be that you're heading into Christmas so the book has to be in early and you've got less time to produce it.

MM: I really liked the way the character Meggan developed over that storyline. Was that more your doing or Jamie's?

ALAN: I thought Captain Britain needed a love interest but I wanted to come up with something a bit different. Brian and Meggan's relationship was one of the subplots I began in the three issues I wrote after Alan quit.

MM: Now those "Captain Britain" stories you did after the relaunch were actually the first ones I saw. Marvel reprinted them in a trade paperback in 1988. I assume they only did those because they couldn't reprint "The Jasper Saga" at that point.

ALAN: That's correct. Alan Moore withheld his permission.... Maybe I should explain since I am regularly asked about this. The "Captain Britain" strip was originally supposed to be printed in conjunction with Dave Gibbons' "Doctor Who" as part of the *Marvel Premiere* title in 1984. It seemed like a big deal at the time because it would be the first time of seeing my work in a "proper American comic." At the eleventh hour, Alan objected and blocked the reprint, without telling me. Spin and myth aside, I know what was really going on and I thought it was daft. Comics are a commercial business and I didn't have DC work lined up, so I needed the





Above: Rough sketch for the cover of the recent *Captain Britain* trade paperback collecting the Alan Moore/Alan Davis run.

Right: Alan drew this image of a back-stabbed Marvelman for Kimoto's *The Miracleman Companion* from TwoMorrows Publishing.

Next Page: Alan's childhood characters, Boots and Glove, make their grand entrance into the "Laser Eraser and Pressbutton" series in *Warrior* #24 & #25.

Captain Britain™ and ©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc. Laser Eraser and Pressbutton, Marvelman™ and ©2003 their respective owners.

intend to try to challenge the bogus legends and muddled misrememberings. I'm not the first person to get ripped off, and many other creators lost far more than I. As far as "Marvelman" is concerned, I still retain all rights to the art, and the characters I designed, because I have only ever sold the right of a single English language publication to Quality Comics. Over the years I sold various rights regarding "Captain Britain," such as the costume design so that he could appear in *Excalibur*, and with the publication of the last "Jasper Saga" trade paperback, both Alan and I sold all our rights to the work we jointly created. Jamie and I had signed work-for-hire contracts during the period we worked together on "Captain Britain" which is why the first trade paperback could be printed prior to the recent one.

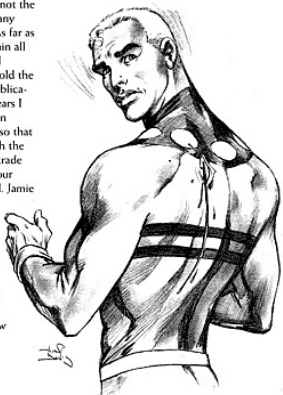
MM: They released that either just before or just after *Excalibur* started, I guess hoping to feed off of the new title. Was anything redone for the collection? Obviously they had to color it....

money. I hoped to make Alan think again by withholding my permission for Eclipse to reprint the "Marvelman" pages I had drawn. I formally notified Alan, Dez, and Eclipse, but my letters were ignored and my "Marvelman" art was published without my permission—or any payment. I wasn't in a position to legally pursue the matter or to even have my side of the story aired. Anyway, it's ancient history now and I don't

ALAN: It wasn't great coloring. The only thing that I changed was to re-ink some minor details of the last issue which Mark Farmer had inked. The last issue of *Captain Britain* was very, very rushed, partly because I had wanted to wind everything up and was given extra pages, but I had also been drawing *Batman* and *the Outsiders* and the deadlines were converging. I didn't have time to do it justice so I asked Mark to ink it. I was never really happy with how it turned out. I had given Mark the sort of breakdowns that I ink over myself and assumed—as all pencilers do—that he was going to be telepathic and understand exactly what my squiggles meant. [laughter] So there were things I didn't like and I tinkered with the inks on the reprint. I should underline that it wasn't anything Mark had done wrong, it was simply the first time I had worked in that way with an inker.

MM: Was Mark established at that time?

ALAN: Yeah, I knew Mark quite well at that time. I'm not sure if he started working with Dave Gibbons on *Green Lantern* by then, but he had been around for a while





and done a lot of good work.

MM: Do you know if there's any talk of re-releasing that trade paperback, since they recently released "The Jasper Saga" as a collection?

ALAN: I don't know. Obviously the reason they put the "Jasper" storyline out was to cash in on Alan Moore's reputation at the moment. I don't really see any likelihood of reprinting another *Captain Britain* book.

MM: It would be a real shame if they didn't, because it's as good if not better than the "Jasper" storyline.

Back over at *Warrior*, you're still doing work there with "Laser Eraser and Pressbutton." I believe it was reprinted here in the US, but it wasn't very visible. How did that come about?

ALAN: I think that actually happened a bit earlier. I'm not sure of the dates, but...

MM: It was just after your run on "Marvelman" had ended.

ALAN: My commitment to "Marvelman" didn't end when the last of the episodes I drew was published. It was a complicated situation and I'm sure everyone

involved has their own version of events. The proportional division of profits had always been likely to cause dissension because so many of the legalities and contractual obligations had been fudged. Arguments about copyright and creators' rights are usually motivated by ego, control, or money. I didn't know who or what to believe because there were so many contradictory claims, so I decided to limit my losses by withdrawing my labor on "Marvelman"—but I didn't sever my ties completely. I still hoped to profit from the work I had already contributed. Silly me! It was so much simpler when *Warrior* first started up and everyone was being equally poorly paid. [laughter]

MM: Emphasis on poorly. [laughter]

ALAN: We all went in knowing that we weren't getting very much money, but we were doing projects where we were being allowed to exercise our creative muscles on material we wouldn't have been allowed to create in mainstream titles. And we were getting high-profile exposure in America where we would potentially get more work. And it did work that way; that was the end result.

MM: So when you left "Marvelman" you weren't completely fed up with *Warrior* yet? Because you then did a

Below: An early version of Glove, Alan's android assassin. Alan didn't like the entire image, so he cut out what he did like and scrapped the rest.

couple of "Laser Eraser and Pressbutton" back-ups.

ALAN: Well, I always enjoyed working with Alan. We had different goals but were enough in sync to pull in the same general direction. The creative partnership was never a problem. The real problem came when the politics started to interfere with the creativity. Then I had to take a step back because it was taking too much of my time. My responsibility to my family was always the key governing factor with any decision I made. I'd actually drawn part of another issue of "Marvelman" which never saw print. I told Dez Skinn I wasn't going to finish it because he owed me money. It wasn't a lot of money but there had been suggestions that Dez wasn't going to be able to pay, so I thought I'd cut my losses.

MM: So you weren't getting paid for

"Marvelman" but you agreed to do "Pressbutton"?

ALAN: No, I got paid but by then the situation between Alan and Dez had degenerated and I decided to stay out of it. I was prepared to continue "Marvelman" under the right circumstances. In the meantime I had the "Laser Eraser and Pressbutton" story which was written by Steve Moore.

MM: Right, under the pseudonym of Pedro Henry.

ALAN: That's right. He'd asked me about doing it while I was still working on "Marvelman" before all the hiccups. And I'd agreed to do the story as long as he used two characters that I'd created, Boots and Glove, who just happened to be a female assassin and a guy who was 90% cyborg.

MM: So they fit right in.

ALAN: Steve had the idea to exploit the similarities in a case of mistaken identity. Pressbutton is attacked because the villains think he is Glove. The villains are so alien that one android male looks much the same as another.

MM: Looking at one of your early drawings of Glove, he looks quite a bit different from the version which saw print in *Warrior*. Was it a gradual evolution in the design or was it just to simplify him to make him easier to draw over and over in a strip?

ALAN: I imagine if I changed it, to simplify the design to work in a comic.

MM: The drawing you sent did look more complicated.

ALAN: I think the drawing I sent you is actually half of a drawing.

MM: Yeah, it looks as though it was cut off.

ALAN: I drew it a few years before I began working in comics. I was trying different things at that time—different boards, inks, and techniques. That was the only bit that I liked so I cut it out and kept that. I was working more illustratively then and would do maybe five or six versions of one image, varying the technique and finish just to see what worked.



This Page: In 1987, Alan went back to those lovable sociopaths, D.R. & Quinch, for a series of one-pagers under the title, "D.R. & Quinch's Incredibly Excruciating Agony Page," this time written by Jamie Delano. Alan: "The original concept was to have a layout similar to a magazine letters page. Three or four phony reader's letters with humorous 'Agony Aunt' responses from D.R. & Quinch. Essentially a text page with one or two spot illustrations. I didn't think this made the most of the visual potential so, after some negotiation, I made each letter and response into a single full-page strip. I have no doubt it was the right choice, but, unfortunately, I sidelined Jamie once again." The series appeared in *2000 A.D.* #525-534 and was inked by Mark Farmer and colored by Alan himself. The series was reprinted in *The Best of 2000 A.D. Special Edition*.

Next Three Pages: "The Origin of the Crusader" was Alan's first professional published story. It first appeared in *Marvel UK's Rampage Monthly* #41 in 1981 and was later reprinted in *The Daredevils* #10 in 1983.

D.R. & Quinch™ and ©2003 2000 A.D.



THE CITY AT NIGHT.

THE ORIGIN OF THE CRUSADER

STORY PLOT & ART: ALAN DAVIS WORDS: PAUL NEARY

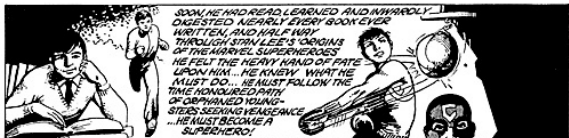
LIKE AN ABANDONED MOVIE SET, IT WAITS AS THE PLAYERS ASSEMBLE TO ENACT THEIR ROLES IN THE GRIM SCENARIO THAT WILL PRESENTLY UNFOLD.

THE COOLED FIGURE GLIDES UNSEEN TO A VANTAGE POINT, AND COLD EYES SURVEY THE ONES BELOW: THEY ARE EVIL-DOERS... AND THEY SHALL PERISH! FOR NOW THE ONE ONCE WEAK WAS STRONG... AND THOSE WHO THINK THEMSELVES POWERFUL SHALL DISCOVER HOW PATHETIC THEY REALLY ARE!

BOOM!

HE FEELS HIS POWER AND REMEMBERS HIS WEAKNESS ON THAT DAY, MANY YEARS BEFORE!

...HE SWORE VENGEANCE ON HIS PARENTS' KILLERS, ON GRATUITOUS VIOLENCE, AND ON THE CRIMINAL CLASSES IN GENERAL.



SOON, HE HAD READ, LEARNED AND INWARDLY DIGESTED NEARLY EVERY BOOK EVER WRITTEN, AND HALF WAY THROUGH STAN LEE'S 'ORIGINS OF THE MARVEL SUPERHEROES' HE FELT THE HEAVY HAND OF FATE UPON HIM... HE KNEW WHAT HE MUST DO... HE MUST FOLLOW THE TIME HONORED PATH OF COURAGEOUS YOUNG STEPS SEEKING VENGEANCE... HE MUST BECOME A SUPERHERO!



ENDLESS HOURS IN THE GYM MOVED HIS BODY TO PERFECTION OF STRENGTH, AGILITY AND FITNESS. HE DID NOT NEGLECT HIS MENTAL FACILITIES, AND BECAME A NUCLEAR PHYSICIST, DOCTOR, LAWYER, ARCHITECT, LAYOUT ARTIST AND ACCOUNTANT!



AFTER DEVELOPING THE COMPLETE HANG- OVER CURE AT THE TENDER AGE OF 23, HE THEN, ABOUT TEN YEARS LATER, IN THE MARTIAL ARTS, THEN THE MARTIAL ARTS AND THEN ONE DAY HE SAID...

"IF I DON'T GET ON WITH IT, I'LL BE DEAD OF OLD AGE!" - AND THUS WAS BORN...

THE CRUSADER!



THE TIME HAD COME... THE HOUR WAS HERE... HIS FIRST MISSION... HE WOULD MAKE THEM PAY STRIP ON THEIR BODIES, BREAK THEIR BONES... HAH! BUT ONE THING AT A TIME... FIRST HE WOULD KILL THEM.

HOLD, EVIL DOERS!



WARNING

READERS ARE WARNED NOT TO COPY THE
CRUSADER BECAUSE HE HAS HAD
EXTENSIVE SPECIALISED TRAINING.
ANY ATTEMPT TO DO SO COULD PROVE

FATAL!

Interlude 2: Paul Neary

MM: You started working professionally at a very young age, and for an American publisher no less. Just how old were you and how were you able to break in?

PAUL NEARY: My first real contact with the comics world was at the first UK Comics Con in Birmingham, England, in 1969. It was there that I was introduced to John Mansfield, who was a Canadian big name fan. He was instrumental to my breaking into comics. John showed interest in my fanzine work and showed my magazines to Jim Warren, who was publisher of a small line of black-and-white magazines, including *Creepy*, *Eerie*, and *Vampirella*. John even sold a sample 3-pager to *Monster Times* who eventually published it in issue #9,

dated May
1972. I was,
by then,



the ripe old age of 22, but the work was done much earlier.

In the summer of 1970, I took samples to New York to show Jim Warren... all this on an assurance from John that he had shown Jim my work and that Jim would look at the new samples. I called Jim when I reached the US and he told me to call round the next day, which I did.

Jim was very lively and liked to ask searching questions, such as, "Why should I hire you when I have people like Maroto, Fernandez, and José Gonzalez (his hot-shot Spanish artists) working for me?" He also showed me these sayings that he had stuck on the walls about the place that said things like, "O.K., so you're a nice guy, but nice guys come second." We must have bantered away for a couple of hours or so, with him arguing the point of being a successful publisher overloaded with established talent—which he was—and me putting the case for youth, inexperience, and low page-rate. During the exchange

he received a call from Bernie Wrightson, with whom he spoke learnedly about the ins and outs of original art ownership—publisher or artist—and when he came back to me, he told me I was a little young to be any good yet. Came over? Not quite. Jim produced an 8-page script and told me that although he thought my samples were useless he had quite enjoyed the chat... so send back pencils, no guarantees, 15 bucks a page.

MM: Your early work was being shown alongside the likes of Alex Toth, Bernie Wrightson, and Esteban Maroto, among others. Was that exciting for

Left: "Paul was only involved with Captain Britain for a very short time, but the strip—and my career in comics—sprang directly from the seeds he had sown." When Paul left his position at Marvel UK, he began a long run of penciling *Captain America*. This drawing was done for the UKCAC. Inks by Paul Neary.

Captain America, Captain Britain
™ and ©2003 their Marvel
Characters, Inc.



Above: Paul Neary inked this piece of promotional art for the "Mutant Massacre" storyline that ran through the X-titles in late 1986 and early 1987. **Next Page:** Paul inked Excalibur during Alan's first run over the course of the first 24 issues. Here's the cover to issue #6, one of the few times Excalibur crossed over with the "serious" X-titles.

Excalibur, X-Men™ and ©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.

you or more intimidating?

PAUL: Neither—I never thought about it in terms of appearing with them. I knew how good they were and it inspired me to try and do better. Maroto especially fascinated me. I was lucky enough to have Al Williamson take me under his wing, so we spoke about artwork, and even he admired Maroto. Thinking about it... it confused me stylistically more than anything. You can talk with friends about Toth, look at the pages... yep, he's the best. Then you look at some Wood... yep, he's the greatest. Then the Williamson pages... yep, no doubt about it. And on it goes.

What it does tell you is that there's more than one way to skin a cat... no, make that more than ten... no, 20....

MM: In *Exie* #69 you even got an issue showcasing your work on the "Hunter" strip. Not many artists got that treatment.

Was that a special thrill for you?

PAUL: I'd like to say it was... but I can't. I was back in England by this time and I was working in a vacuum. I was not connected to the British comics fraternity and there was no communal buzz about things like this. I was probably disappointed to find I wasn't getting paid for the thing.

MM: Originally Marvel UK was strictly a reprint house. Were they originating any new material before you came on as editor?

PAUL: Dez Skinn's arrival—months before me—signalled the upgrade from reprint house to a publisher with origination capability. When I arrived, Dez had begun to publish weekly black-and-white self-cover comics of *Hulk* and *Spider-Man*. The original idea was to have the pages drawn by British artists like Gibbons, Bolland, Lloyd, Dillon, Bolton, and Stokes.

Dez wanted me to help with the problems that were arising in the UK Marvel offshoot that had not been anticipated by him—and which were news to me as well. He was also in the process of launching the *Doctor Who* weekly and had an sf magazine called *Starburst*. The comics left from the reprint-only era were the *Star Wars* weekly and *Planet of the Apes* and *Conan* monthlies. The US-originated *Captain Britain* weekly had ceased publication.

MM: What did you have to go through in order to convince the powers-that-were that a line of original material would be a worthwhile venture?

PAUL: Dez had met with Stan Lee and agreed to start Marvel UK. By start, I mean upgrade from a reprint house. Dez thought locally produced, new material would sell better to a UK audience. I don't know how detailed their discussions were about the amount of original content. According to Dez, he had agreed with Stan to bring money people on board, but during my early days there it was clear that they now ruled the roost. Moreover, they and Jim Galton—who was our advisor—were clearly of the mind that Marvel comics were the greatest comics on Earth, so why try to originate new pages when there was a gigantic pool of material already in existence?

MM: Herb Trimpe drew the "Captain Britain" strip for a while. Was it difficult to get established pros to work on the new line, or were you more or less forced to go out and find new—and thereby cheaper—talent?

PAUL: When I arrived, "Captain Britain" had died. When I looked at the back issues, they seemed weak when you think that we were competing with 2000 A.D. in its heyday. I thought that we could do better if we were given some money, but no one was interested. Truth to tell, whatever Stan and Dez agreed, the consensus of opinion always seemed to be towards returning to the reprint house of the past. By the time Dez left, there was no budget for new pages at all. In order to save *Doctor Who*, I had to change it to a monthly and lose a lot of the comic pages. I think those pages and the backup strips in *Star Wars* were all we were originating for a while. In retrospect, I don't know how we got them under the wire. The *Star Wars* backups allowed me to give some pages to new talent, although on a limited scale. Fortunately I was able to give some pages to Alan Davis to draw and

also start Alan Moore in comics.

MM: Alan talked a bit about the first time you met; it was at a convention where you were reviewing portfolios and he went through the line. What was your first reaction to his portfolio? What was there that separated him from the rest?

PAUL: He was good.

MM: Alan said you allowed him to learn from his mistakes by letting him see them in print. How far did that go? Were there things you would just say, "No, I can't let this go through"?

PAUL: Alan wasn't making "mistakes" per se, despite his protestations to the contrary. His first "Captain Britain" episode didn't have enough room for the balloons, so we cut and pasted the panels



over an extra story page. Who's fault was that? Mine probably for not telling Alan to leave 1/3 of the panel "dead." Also, things like use of perspective are gradually improved upon as an artist gains confidence, and limited skill in this matter is not so much a mistake as something to be improved upon. We all have to start somewhere and in Alan's case, rubbing it all out and beginning over was not that place.

MM: Was that your philosophy with Alan in particular, or artists in general?

PAUL: My general philosophy on this is that in your career you will be asked to draw certain things over and over again... and over again... once more... and just one more time please... and unless you are going to do it the same each time, there will be some of your efforts that are better than others. Or maybe they're worse; it depends on who's judging.

MM: You basically had two novices in Alan and Dave Thorpe taking over what would become Marvel UK's flagship character. How closely did you work with them on the strip? Where did you step in to help and where did you step back and let them do their thing?

PAUL: As I remember, I got little or no funding for this project. There were no meetings, I just financed it by using reprint covers on other magazines instead of originating new ones. I don't think the money people knew

or cared. Consequently it was just a bit of fun for Dave and Alan to start on... almost like paid fanzine work. I used to skim the stories, but I don't remember changing anything. Dave Thorpe was good, very imaginative... a lot of his work was built on by Alan Moore when he took over, but started with Dave. As for Alan, see previous answer.

MM: Were you generally happy with the direction

"Captain Britain" and the line as a whole were going? Did it meet your expectations?

PAUL: I wanted "Captain Britain" to read like a British-produced strip for the first time... no Houses of Parliament, no Duke of Edinburgh in the crowd, no Victorian policemen saying "wot," no trams in the street. I think it succeeded—also, it gave two creators a chance.

MM: Why exactly did you leave Marvel UK that first time? Was it simply to get back on the creative side of the table?

PAUL: I was fired. The seeds of my unseemly downfall were sown when a new accountant joined the company. Rather unfortu-

nately he one day suggested to me that we join forces and go after the managing director's job. If you look at photographs of me from that time period you might see a slight glistening behind my ears... it's moisture.

Like a hero I said, "Forget it you fiend"... like a hero I didn't tell the MD... and like a very unimaginative person I didn't realize that the only safe place for the holder of



such knowledge is, in the fullness of time, through the front portal and into the street.

Job status: looking for one.

Ear status: slightly drier.

MM: You went on to have a long run on Captain America. You started out doing full art, but eventually you basically became an inker. Why the switch?

PAUL: I was penciling right up until I joined Marvel UK for the second time... then about seven years ago when I left, I was so burned out that inking one of my Marvel UK artist friends—Bryan Hitch—seemed an easy thing to do and it sort of went on a bit. It wasn't a conscious switch. In my defense, I have penciled a *Star Trek* story and a *Ten Titans* inventory issue in the last year or so.

MM: The next time you worked with Alan was, I believe, near the end of his run on Batman and the Outsiders and then on Detective. Had you been following his work or was his leaps in improvement a bit of a surprise?

PAUL: I hadn't really been following his career, but I knew he was improving which was no surprise at all.

MM: You then went over to *Excalibur* with him. Did you look at it as a partnership by then?

PAUL: Not really... I was still penciling. It came out of adversity, not choice. Alan had witnessed my entering the paper-shredder of US comics whereby an inker got suddenly involved in a penciler/inker's work. As an analogy, think of Steve Ditko and then his work when inked. That sort of thing was what I suspected Alan wanted to avoid when DC started pressing tight deadlines on him and suggesting he use an inker. I hadn't ever inked more than a few pages of anyone else's work—although I had inked a con booklet cover of Alan's—so it was a bit of a surprise when he asked me to ink him. DC were not keen—they could not see why one penciler would want another penciler to ink him. These days they tell me kindly that they don't think I'm quite ready for penciling.... It's



nice to have a change.

MM: What was your contribution to the *Wolverine: Bloodlust* story? The plot came from Alan, then what?

PAUL: I dialogued it to his rough wording, then we haggled over the odd turn of phrase he didn't like.

MM: Do you look at that as a special project? Wasn't it the only time you, Alan, and Bernie worked together as a team?

PAUL: It was special.... I remember trawling art shops to find watercolor paper that Bernie felt okay using and running tests to see if it was stretch-free after wetting—we'd heard horror stories about paper stretch moving the color out from under the photographic black line acetate—this was before computer coloring. One good thing is that we still have the acetate cels

Previous Page: When Paul came back to Marvel UK as Editorial Director, he had a hand in the creation of many of the characters shown in this Alan Davis-drawn image.

All characters TM and [©]2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.

Above: Page one of "Wildweed," created and written by Paul with full art (including painted color) by Alan.

Wildweed TM and [©]2003 Paul Neary.



Above: Pages 2 and 3 from "Wildweed" which was intended for an environmentally-conscious magazine, *Ark*. The project fell through and was never published—only 3 pages were produced.

Next Page: A promo piece for *ClanDestine*, one of the Marvel UK series edited by Paul.

ClanDestine™ and ©2003
Marvel Characters, Inc.
Wildweed™ and ©2003 Paul
Neary.

which are gorgeous to look at. Also the original pages are larger than normal and Alan's pencils were so tight that I got to use these delicate, old quills that I have hardly used since... good memories and one of my favorite Neary ink jobs. It was one of the few times we worked together directly, the other being the "Wildweed" strip.

MM: What's the story behind "Wildweed"? How did the idea originate?

PAUL: Bernie was editing a green magazine called *Ark* and I wrote a few sample scripts for the publishers to look at. One of these was about a bookish chaos scientist called Wildweed who was able to relate seemingly random events to solve mysteries using the logic that lies behind "chaotic" behaviour. Alan agreed to draw the opening page to make it easier for the non-creatives to visualize it.

MM: Was that a conscious effort to try to go beyond the comic book industry, or was it just a job opportunity?

PAUL: It was for an older and wiser audience, so I was able to write a plot that I found enjoyable to write... less formulaic, you might say.

MM: You and Alan pitched a few ideas together to Marvel and DC. Was it frustrating that none of them got picked up, or did you look at it as simply part of the business?

PAUL: One of the problems of working on established characters is that you hit the rule book, unless you are a mega-star and they want to trade on your fame. I don't think it was frustrating as much as a measure of personal clout, or lack of it. I'm not sure the actual quality of work came into it much.

MM: Why did you go back to Marvel UK?

PAUL: I was burned out after juggling my penciling and inking assignments. When I found out that the guy who I had problems with at Marvel UK had left, I thought I'd give it another try... and possibly be better

equipped to watch my back the second time around.

MM: Do you enjoy editing as much as being a creator?

PAUL: I wasn't a line editor, I was Editorial Director and the output of the company was decided by me and the managing director. The first wave of eight US comics was needed within months of my appointment—most of them were my characters. Also I had to blood new talent immediately to write and draw for the US market, which was not easy in the volumes eventually achieved. We were doing almost a comic a day with very few staff, none of whom had worked on US material before. What I am saying is that I was being a creator, but in a different, wider role.

MM: From an editorial standpoint, what went wrong with *ClanDestine*? Why didn't it succeed?

PAUL: Alan came on board after a lot of the big sales had dwindled. Our first comic, *Death's Head*, sold one and a quarter million, and the investment-driven explosion of sales at that time could only result in what it did—a slump. Marvel UK books were only a bolt-on addition to the US range and dealers cut our books from their order lists first, irrespective of quality. We transferred Alan's book to the US to remove him from the disadvantage we were suffering, but it was too late.

As a sort of footnote, I also think that it was a brave move for Alan to make the group a family. A lot of the interest in group books has historically involved the sexual dynamic between the members... and Alan explored a different way of doing things. I think readers of niche genre publications such as westerns, mysteries, romances, or super-heroes, often resist innovation, preferring the well trodden

path as a sort of comfort blanket.

MM: You're back to inking again, and on some very successful titles, too. Do you plan on sticking with that for the foreseeable future? Would you like to do full art again?

PAUL: Only in limited amounts. I lose money because my inking rate is higher, pro-rata, than my penciling rate. This is because I'm better known at this point for my inking. If I was to "take a loss" for a while the process might reverse itself, but I can't really see the logic in doing that.



Part 3: Becoming a Big Fish from across a Big Pond

MM: How long did it take from when you started submitting to DC and Marvel before you got responses back?

ALAN: Well, I only put one submission in to Marvel US, and that went through Marvel UK and was rejected. It was quite early on in my career and I wasn't really very good. It was just a try-out page on *Spider-Man* and, like I said, it really wasn't very good.

I never sent any samples to DC. They had already begun coming to Britain to look for artists. As I said earlier, Dave Gibbons, Brian Bolland, and Kevin O'Neill had already gone over to DC which left a space for me to get into 2000 A.D. It was during one of their headhunting visits that I met Dick Giordano and he

eventually offered me the *Aquaman* mini-series.

MM: So did Dick actually come to England to meet with you?

ALAN: It wasn't to meet with just me. DC invited a fairly large group of creators to a meal at the Savoy in London as a sort of high-powered introduction. There were quite a few creators from 2000 A.D. and *Warrior* at the event like Ian Gibson, Jim Baikie, Cam Kennedy, John Wagner, Alan Grant, Steve Parkhouse, Alan Moore, and David Lloyd—they were big names over here at the time. I sort of fell in there somewhere, but I wasn't one of the main ones DC was eager to hire.

MM: They offered you this *Aquaman* mini-series—was that the series with the camouflage costume that Craig Hamilton drew?

ALAN: Yeah, that's right. I think it was actually Neal Potzner's design. The new Aquaman look was based on some ballet costume that he'd seen.

MM: So you were given the design—was the script already done?

ALAN: There was a full script and Dick Giordano also sent me a volume of *Time-Life* that had reference of whales and squid and things like that. It was really nice; Dick Giordano was always incredibly considerate. I hammered out the first issue in about two weeks to prove I was reliable. I was still doing pencil breakdowns because I would have inked myself at that point.

MM: So were they basically looking to see what you could do first before they went ahead with the project?

ALAN: No, I'd been given the project, but I think that *Aquaman* was considered to be of low importance which was why I'd been given it in the first place. DC knew that I could do superhero artwork from having seen "Captain Britain" and "Marvelman." I had seen it as being important because I love the Aquaman character.

MM: He's always been one of my favorites, as well.





ALAN: And if I had been given a choice of any character to do at DC, I would have asked for Aquaman.

MM: That's a little odd. Aquaman's probably not that high on many people's lists.

ALAN: Well, when I was a kid I could swim—I really enjoyed swimming and still swim now. You can fantasize about being Aquaman swimming because you've got that freedom of movement in water. Whereas you can't fly, so you're not Superman. Aquaman is the easier hero to imitate.

MM: I did the same thing. My family went to the beach a lot—we lived near the ocean—and I did the same kind of thing. I noticed in your Afterword for *The Nail* trade paperback collection that you mentioned a lot of the odd, secondary characters that you enjoyed more than many of the main characters, and I see Aquaman as walking that line between the two. So, for you, this was as good a first assignment as you could get.

ALAN: Yeah, it was fantastic! I wasn't on the top of the list of people DC was looking for, but I was given the *Aquaman* which is exactly what I would have asked for.

MM: You said you enjoy Aparo's art and *Aquaman* had some of his best work, so...

ALAN: Oh yeah, Aparo's art was a huge influence on me. Partly because of the poor distribution over here, I tended to get a lot more of the Aparo stuff—*The Brave & the Bold*, "The Spectre," the *Aquaman* were more available than most of the high profile titles.

MM: Following him on *Batman & The Outsiders*, did you—

ALAN: I didn't follow him, I was a fill-in! What happened there was DC wanted to put the *Batman & The Outsiders* book out in the two formats.

MM: Right, the Baxter format.

ALAN: Yes, and for a year they would have two books coming out in one month. One—the direct edition, on Baxter paper—would only be sold in comic shops and the other would be sold on newsstands. The direct one would be reprinted as a newsstand edition the following year. So they needed someone to fill in for Jim Aparo for a year on the newsprint version.

MM: What made them choose you to do that over the *Aquaman* project?

ALAN: All I can tell you is that I had a phone call from Dick Giordano and he said, "We've got the *Aquaman*, we love it, but we don't want you to do it now. We

Alan's very first US assignment was to be an *Aquaman* mini-series that was instead later given to Craig Hamilton. These are some of the designs he worked up for the series for editor Dick Giordano: (l. to r.) Aquaman, Ocean Master, Nuidia Silverhand, and Mera.

Aquaman, Mera, Nuidia Silverhand, Mera™ and ©2003 DC Comics.

Below: *Batman & the Outsiders* #28, page 17. Of Katana, Alan says, "I didn't regard my flat-chested, muscular and shaggy-haired version of Katana as a redesign, just making the most of the character; but it did cause a few waves and there was initially talk of redrawing the pages."

Next Page: Splash page from *Detective* #574, written by one of Alan's favorite writers to work with, Mike W. Barr. Inks by Paul Neary.

Batman, *Katana*™ and ©2003 DC Comics.

want you to do *Batman & the Outsiders*." And he explained how they planned to publish parallel *Batman & the Outsiders* books. I said, "Well, I'd like to finish the *Aquaman* first." And he said, "We need you to start on *Batman & the Outsiders* right away." I said, "I can't really manage both of them. I want to stay with the *Aquaman*." He said, "Well it's a much more sensible career move if you took on the *Batman & the Outsiders*. It's very successful and it's very high profile." I eventually agreed but only after Dick promised me that I'd still get to do the *Aquaman* book. But within about a month-and-a-half, the *Aquaman* book had been given to someone else. Having said that, what Dick told me was true. Going on to *Batman & the Outsiders* was a smart career move.

MM: Were you disappointed, though? Did you come to enjoy *Batman & the Outsiders* as much as you might have enjoyed *Aquaman*?

ALAN: I think in all things there's good and bad. I missed doing the *Aquaman*, although I think Craig Hamilton did a great job on it. I don't think I'd have done anywhere near the sophisticated job that he did. It also served me well to go on to *Batman & the Outsiders* because I met Mike Barr and Mike was really great to work with. I learned a tremendous amount from Mike Barr.

MM: How was working with Mike Barr? You still work with him occasionally. In fact, you just did a black-&-white *Batman* short story with him not too long ago.

ALAN: I think that Mike's a vastly underestimated writer. He's the most visual writer I've ever worked with. If he describes a panel, you know the panel will work the way that he describes it. A lot of writers tend to write cinematically where they describe a sequence of movements in a panel and it just doesn't work as a single image. Or they'll ask for some complicated image where you've got something in the foreground, middle ground, and the background, all at the same time. Silly stuff like that. But Mike is incredibly visual and he really understands pacing. I thought he did some great stories, too. *Detective* #571, for instance, is brilliant.

He was also a good editor. Remember, at the time, he was also editing *Batman & the Outsiders*.

MM: Were you nervous taking over such a high-profile book as your first job for DC?

ALAN: Well, yeah, because my work would be sandwiched in between Jim Aparo's issues and I was only going to be there for twelve issues. I was treading water, I couldn't really change anything, because everything had been plotted out for twelve months. I think the reason I was chosen is because my work is influenced by and comparable with Jim Aparo's.

MM: I can see some parallels: you both have a strong sense of anatomy and you





both have a slight cartooniness in your figures. Maybe that's what they were seeing.

ALAN: Well, as I said, Jim Aparo was an influence on me. That was fairly obvious, but I don't know if that was in the decision making process. It would be logical to assume so.

MM: Was there a particular character you enjoyed drawing in that series?

ALAN: No, not more than any other. Batman is obviously special, but I believe it is important to discover something worthwhile and exciting in every character

or else they will appear dull. It isn't the case of me adding something, it's the practical process of finding something in them as they exist.

MM: So you knew it was a twelve-issue run. Did you know you were going to move over to *Detective* after your run was over?

ALAN: No, but a strange thing happened, shortly after my agreeing to do *Batman & the Outsiders*. Chris Claremont phoned and asked me to do the *X-Men*. I said I couldn't because I had just agreed to do *Batman & the Outsiders*. He phoned a number of times after that asking me if I wanted to do *X-Men*, and I kept saying no. Part of the reason, aside from honoring my commitment, was that I was really intimidated about the prospect of working with Chris.

MM: So how did the transition to *Detective* come about?

ALAN: I really enjoyed working with Mike. I enjoyed drawing Batman and the idea of doing pure Batman was enticing.

MM: Was your interest in Batman a result of your interest in Neal Adams and Aparo?

ALAN: I might have mentioned earlier, but my knowledge of Batman had more to do with Jim Aparo and Don Newton. I'd never seen much of the Neal Adams Batman until I had been working on *Batman & the Outsiders* for about three issues, something like that. That was because I didn't go to comic marts or dealers even when I'd started working in comics. I went along to a Westminster mart with Paul Neary and he convinced me to buy the overpriced, old comics. That was really my first real experience of Neal Adams' Batman—though I'd seen two issues printed in black-&-white some time earlier. I didn't even know the bulk of it existed. The only Neal Adams work I knew was in *X-Men*, *Avengers*, and "The Inhumans"—the Marvel stuff.

MM: The first time we see your version of Batman in *Detective*, it's the big splash page and they're both

Right: Batman wonders if Robin will live in this panel from *Detective* #574, the lead-in to "Batman: Year Two." Alan: "This is an example of Mike Barr's visual skill. I drew this panel exactly the way he described it. The panel shape, the shadow, the row of mismatched chairs, and Batman sitting back with his arms hanging at his side. It's a small image, but Mike really nailed the mood." Inks by Paul Neary.

Below: Alan worked up this image of the Joker and henchman in preparation for a story in *Detective*.

Next Page: The original cover to *Detective* #575, the first chapter of "Batman: Year Two." The Mauser in Batman's hand was later modified by Dick Giordano for the published version. Inks by Paul Neary.

Batman, Joker™ and ©2003 DC Comics.

DESIGNED WITH
GARY VEE AND

ILLUSTRATED
BY PAUL NEARY



grinning. That kind of established that you weren't going for a grim and gritty feel for the book. What were you going for? Were you harking back to that sense of fun from the '60s comics?

ALAN: That was down to Mike. I didn't have a direction or a plan. At the time I was still really learning how to draw the basics, and I wasn't sure if I could cut it in the American market. I continued to write and draw "Captain Britain" for as long as I could, just in case I needed to retreat or was fired.

MM: In that first issue you've got Batman and Robin and also the Joker and Catwoman—really the core characters. Was that more exciting or intimidating for you?

ALAN: I'd say intimidating, because I really didn't know what I was meant to be doing. There was some mixed information at the time about what DC was trying to do with the character. *Dark Knight* had already been out and "Year One" was due out soon. So there was this thing with the

grim and gritty, more realistic Batman being "right" and the slightly quirky Batman being "wrong." I wasn't really aware so much of doing a humorous Batman. I just thought it was a surreal Batman. I thought that the whole set-up was more of a dark fairy tale; it was so bizarre it couldn't exist in reality.



MM: With the odd villains especially.

ALAN: And the fact that everything happens at night when normal people go to bed. There was something of a Grimm's fairy tale about it. The Joker, the Penguin, the Riddler, etc., are all such weird characters—straight out of *Alice in Wonderland*. The only way I can accept the basic premise is as a surreal, dreamlike construct. But I think that is true of the entire super-hero genre.

MM: In the anniversary issue you were able to ink yourself in the first chapter. Was it a matter of doing fewer pages so you had the time to do it and said, "I'd like to give it a shot?"

ALAN: I honestly don't remember.

MM: You inked eight pages and Paul Neary inked you on the closing chapter.

ALAN: I think that might have had more to do with Paul being busy with penciling *Captain America*. He continued penciling for a number of years while inking my work.

MM: You also drew Sherlock Holmes in that issue. Were you a fan of the Sherlock Holmes stories?

ALAN: Oh yeah, I like Sherlock Holmes, particularly the Jeremy Brett television shows. I thought he portrayed the definitive Sherlock Holmes. So I was actually looking at Jeremy Brett when I drew that issue.

MM: And all this time Chris Claremont is bugging you to come work with him?

ALAN: Well, not bugging me; I was very flattered about it.

MM: He kept at it though. Was *Excalibur* his ultimate worm to tempt you over?

ALAN: I don't know. I've never really asked Chris about this. I wonder if, after saying no to the *X-Men* a few times, he thought I just didn't want to do *X-Men*. I was very intimidated about following the stellar cast of artists on the *X-Men*.

There had never been a mediocre artist on the *X-Men*. I didn't want to be the guy that comes onto it and the sales just drop through the floor because I'm so bad. The first I knew of *Excalibur* was when Chris phoned and instead of asking, did I want to draw the *X-Men*, said Marvel is doing another *X-book* and it's going to be set in England and Captain Britain is in it. Now Chris was one of the creators of Captain Britain so he obviously had an interest in him. So I don't know whether Captain Britain was included in the group to encourage me. I'd said my good-byes to Captain Britain when I did that final issue. Having said that, I don't regret the fact that Captain Britain was in *Excalibur*—I think it made the book work.

MM: It was kind of odd though that he and Meggan were included even though neither was a mutant.

ALAN: I didn't think she should have been a mutant, but I think she became one in the end.

MM: So Chris had the *Excalibur* idea pretty well established before you came on board. He developed what direction the book would take?

ALAN: It wasn't something that concerned me. Working with familiar characters was a safety blanket.

MM: Was it *Excalibur* that pulled you away from *Detective* or was your run coming to an end anyway?

ALAN: I actually left *Detective* early. There were lots of problems with deadlines. It got really stupid so I just had to get free of it.



MM: You left in the middle of the "Year Two" storyline, right?

ALAN: I did the first issue and penciled about half of the second issue.

MM: Well it must have been fairly bad for you to leave in the middle of an important storyline.

ALAN: It was. I felt like I was being treated very badly. But when I complained or attempted to change things, I was ignored or placated with empty promises. As soon as I quit, everyone wanted to get things sorted out. Dick Giordano had said something to me when I first started working on *Batman & the Outsiders*, which was that because I was professional and always met my deadlines, I would have a very unhappy time with editors. He said, "Editors only take notice of problems—they're fire-fighters. If you deliver work on time and you're

reliable, the editors will never speak to you." And this is what happened, because I was turning the work in early, I was in limbo. Essentially, Mike Barr and I were working together without any editorial interaction. Which wouldn't have been a problem—except that things started to go wrong!



Above: Pages 30 and 31 of *Uncanny X-Men Annual* #11, some of Alan's first work for Marvel U.S.

Next Page: Alan feels this page from *Excalibur* #15 "sums up what *Excalibur* was all about." Inks by Paul Neary.

Excalibur, *Wolverine*™ and ©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.



MM: Were you talking with Mike about the situation? Did he try to intercede on your behalf?

ALAN: He did, but he was just the writer and had his own problems. There was never a single major problem; it was the accumulation of petty stuff. The last straw was when my art was changed. In "Year Two" Batman decides to use a gun—Joe Chill's gun—because Robin had been injured and Batman believed he couldn't fight crime without leveling the playing field. The problem was, because of the size of Batman—in super-hero proportions—he needed a big gun. Mike had asked for a Mauser—the same as Manhunter. So, obviously, Joe Chill used a Mauser when Bruce Wayne's parents were killed. However, in "Year One" there's a small shot drawn by David Mazzucchelli were you can clearly see Joe Chill doesn't use a Mauser. Rather than change that one panel from "Year One," all of the artwork I'd drawn for "Year Two" was changed, including the cover. It

just seemed so ridiculous. I was given the opportunity to redraw the pages myself, but I thought it was wrong on so many levels and declined. I should point out that I had been sent copies of "Year One" early and pointed out the discrepancy between the guns and since I was told to proceed, assumed the problem had been solved. Dick Giordano made the art changes to my work by replacing the gun throughout. He did a good job, but that wasn't the real issue. It was the loss of trust. That's the thing that really annoys me, realizing I was working with people who really didn't give a damn about what I was doing, I just didn't want to work with them.

MM: I think it's a shame when the continuity police get in the way of a good story and take away good story elements.

ALAN: I have no problem with maintaining continuity. It's the politics and deceit. As a creator you lose all control of your work when it arrives on the editor's desk. You

need to have faith the editor is being straight and reliable if you are to do your best work.

MM: Did you go straight from *Detective* to working on the *Excalibur Special*?

ALAN: No, I think I did a *New Mutants Annual*, an *X-Men Annual*, and two fill-ins on the monthly *X-Men* book.

MM: Was that just gearing up for *Excalibur*?

ALAN: I'd quit DC; I needed work and *Excalibur* wasn't ready to go ahead.

MM: When the *Special Edition* came out it definitely was special. It had a nice format, the coloring was very nice—did you feel that they were putting extra effort into the book, really giving it a chance to get some attention?

ALAN: I don't know if I was thinking that way. I was obviously hoping it would do very well, but I was working really far ahead, so by the time the first issue was out, I was already into the fourth or fifth of the regular series.

MM: How was Ann Nocenti to work with?

ALAN: I didn't really have to much to do with Ann. I dealt a lot more with Terry Kavanagh.

MM: Right. He co-edited the first issue of the regular series and then pretty much edited the book for the rest of the time you were there. So how was Terry to work with? He's probably not as well known as most of the Marvel editors.

ALAN: Well, Terry was great. He was just a brilliant guy to work with and has proved to be a good friend. When I quit *Excalibur*, it was he who encouraged me to go back to it and write it. I wouldn't have taken the chance with anyone else.

MM: With issue #2 you start getting into the humor aspect a bit more with the Warwolves story. Were you having fun with that? Did you have any influence in the humor of the book?

ALAN: I was surprised when *Excalibur* was initially dubbed a cosmic comedy. During one of the few conversations I had with Ann Nocenti, she said that my Batman was "so funny." I didn't really regard it as being funny; I thought I was just drawing Batman the way that Batman was meant to be. It's possibly a cultural thing—to

me *Excalibur* followed onto the *Captain Britain* in a way, in its tone.

MM: Yeah, it was much more a *Captain Britain* title than it was an *X-Men* title. I guess it was good timing, because at the time the *X-Men* were assumed dead and you could operate *Excalibur* as an *X-Men* title without having to interact with them in every issue. Do you think that freed you to do the humorous approach?

ALAN: I was getting plots and concentrating on one plot at a time. I had a hint of things that were happening in the future, but nothing definite.

MM: There was a crossover in issues #7 and #8 where you had to interact in the "Inferno" storyline. Did you have any problems with that, or was it just another plot? A lot of creators take issue at having to interrupt their storylines for crossover events.





Above: One of four postcard images Alan would send in reply to fan mail.

Right: This story—part of the “Crosstime Caper”—developed from a plot Alan wrote much earlier. Alan wrote notes to the colorist, Inks by Paul Neary.

Below: John Carter of Mars via Nightcrawler and Excalbur. Inks by Paul Neary.

Excalbur; Kitty Pryde™ and ©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.

ALAN: I think it's one of those things that you just accept as part of the job. As far as I'm concerned, the creative considerations are always interfered with by the commercial considerations. And crossovers are just a different variant.

MM: Did you come up with the cover to issue #3 with Juggernaut or was that suggested to you?

ALAN: I was actually given free rein on the covers. That was one of the most fun things for me on *Excalbur*. I would be sent the plot and Terry would say, “Have you got any cover ideas?” I would say, “Well, I've thought about this,” and send a sketch. Terry would say, “Yeah! That looks cool!” and I went ahead and did it. Happy days!

MM: Were you submitting one at a time and redoing it if they didn't quite like it?

ALAN: Well, usually Terry accepted it. I don't know if that meant that it was good or if Terry was just very easily pleased. [laughter] I don't think I ever had to make any major changes on any of the covers. They usually went through on the first idea. I don't think you can talk high concept when you're talking about what was essentially a one-page gag, really.

MM: What was the idea behind the back covers being pin-ups?

ALAN: That was because it was a higher priced format book; Marvel wanted to give the reader something extra.

MM: I noticed issue #4 was dedicated to Dave Thorpe. Was that you or Chris or both of you deciding to do that?

ALAN: I asked for it to be dedicated to him because I don't feel Dave or Paul Neary ever get the credit for what they created. As is the case with this latest reprint of the “Captain Britain.” It focuses on the work Alan Moore and I did together, and gives the impression that no one else was involved. When in actual fact, most of the characters and situations were already in place before these storylines Alan and I worked on began.

MM: Had you been talking with Dave at all at that point? Had you seen him at all?

ALAN: No, no, I had very little to do with Dave. I can't really say I got on with him that well, because we were very different people. It was just the right thing to do—the Crazy Gang was his idea.

MM: There were a few issues there that you missed. Were you having deadline problems?



ALAN: No, deadlines were tight, but I was ill for a while and I didn't know how long I was going to be out, so I just said make it a couple of issues to be on the safe side.

MM: With issue #13, you made some changes to Captain Britain's costume. Was that just to simplify things for you?

ALAN: Yeah, the colorist or separator could never figure out how to color Captain Britain. They couldn't figure out which was a muscle line and which was a stripe, so you constantly had this harlequin thing happening, particularly on his arms.

MM: With issue #16 you started getting plot credits.

ALAN: That was a mistake. I had contributed to the plot of issue #14 but the credit had been omitted, so I was given credits on later issues to correct the oversight. No, it doesn't make sense, but that's what happened. What I had contributed to issue #14 was the basic scenario for the crazed alternate Earth. I had originally proposed it to Paul Neary at Marvel UK before I started work on "Captain Britain." I had aspirations to write from the beginning. [laughter] I knew Marvel UK wanted to use Marvel US characters but were concerned about making waves. I suggested an Earth-2 style variation on the Marvel Universe to create a scenario where Marvel UK could use all of Marvel's mainstream characters without any entanglements. All I ever produced were a couple of pages of notes and two pages of rough pencil art. Anyway, when Chris started the "Cross-time Caper" he asked me if there were any alternate dimensions I fancied visiting. I remembered this Earth-2 idea and sent a copy of my handwritten notes to Terry. It was originally supposed to have a mainstream tone with touches of satire and weirdness; the Captain America/Deathlok combination was a symbol of American industrialization; Giant-Man was growing out of control, miles high, polluting the ocean and developing his own weather patterns. It became something significantly different, and I think better, as Chris fitted the elements into the broader context of the "Cross-time Caper" story. I learned a lot on that issue about the positive potential of Marvel's improvisational approach to storytelling. The way Chris dialogued the art was a revelation. I wish I had a fraction of Chris' versatility with words.

MM: Whose idea was it to put Nightcrawler into the role of John Carter of Mars? Was Chris a fan of



Burroughs, too?

ALAN: I can't recall ever discussing it with Chris, but I have bored pretty much everyone with my appreciation of Edgar Rice Burroughs in general, and John Carter in particular, and I have found a lot of kindred spirits in the industry. A common appreciation of E.R.B., Robert E. Howard, Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, and E.E. Doc Smith, for example, is shared by most creators because their literary fantasy forms the foundation of comics. I do remember the *Excalibur* story was originally just one issue, but after Chris saw my pencils for the first 11 pages, he rewrote the final page of the plot so that we could do a second issue.

MM: Considering the way your run on *Detective* ended, what made you decide to go back and do *Full Circle*, the sequel to "Year Two"?



Above: Alan's first cover design for *Batman: Full Circle* (left) was rejected. With a little modification (right), Alan was able to use the design for the cover of the UK reprint edition.

Next Page: Promotional art for *Batman: Full Circle*.

Batman, Rasper, Robin.™ and ©2003 DC Comics.

ALAN: I should explain a couple of things to put this in context. Freelancers have to make decisions about the direction of their career on fairly fuzzy agreements. It can be a very paranoid environment. One editor-in-chief—who I won't name for obvious reasons—told his editors to never compliment the freelancers on the work they had completed or they would make them arrogant and become difficult to deal with. "Tell them you received the work and that it's okay, nothing more. Keep them worried," was the instruction. Any creative process is already emotionally charged because of the degree of personal involvement, but with the addition of jealousies about pay differentials and fan response, the normal workplace tensions can be exaggerated to a degree of sub-Hollywood stupidity. I do value an editor for the perspective and support they can offer, but I am also enough of a realist to recognize that editors are the interface between the company and creator. Traditionally, historically, commercial and artistic values are in

opposition, but I have always regarded myself as an entertainer as opposed to an artist with a capital "A." Comics are a business, and I have been fairly ruthless about concentrating my efforts in the direction most likely to guarantee me continued employment and job satisfaction. Not just by aspiring to the highest quality I can achieve within a deadline but, as a businessman, making sure I'm not sunk by someone else. "You're only as good as you're last job," to corrupt the movie cliché. Many really talented and dedicated creators have been misused and discarded by apathetic, unimaginative, political, or just downright malicious editors. I have quit a number of assignments—only once before my obligation had been met—because I hate petty politics. Some people seem to thrive on the game but I would rather devote my creative energies to producing comics.

So, to get to the point, I didn't want to work with Denny O'Neil. I never had a falling out with him and I don't believe he

ever said or did anything to intentionally harm me. I had only met him once, very briefly, and had spoken to him, again very briefly, on the phone a handful of times. That was the problem: I could never reach him, so I have no idea if I had done something to offend him or if he just didn't think I was worth his time. As I live on the other side of the Atlantic and can't drop into the office, I need to work with someone who I can rely on to protect my interests and keep me informed. That did not happen during my time on *Detective*. When I agreed to do the *Full Circle* book it was on the understanding that Denny wouldn't be involved, but after the contracts were signed it suddenly transpired that Denny, as Batman group editor, would be in a remote supervisory position. The script was great and I had scheduled time to do the work, so I decided to proceed.

MM: Did things go better on this go 'round? Were you happy with the results?

ALAN: 'Fraid not. Paul Neary was scheduled to ink the book and Bernie Jaye was going to color it. I had a holiday planned, so I was way ahead of the deadline and stupidly sent in the art early. The next thing I knew was that Paul had been told that his deadline had been advanced because another prestige book was behind schedule and, because I had completed the pencils, *Full Circle* could be published earlier to balance the books. The new ridiculously tight deadline meant Paul and Bernie both had to drop out. It seemed like the quality of the book might be saved when Mark Farmer came to the rescue on the inks—and met the deadline by burning the candle at both ends for a couple of months—but the coloring also had to be done in a rush and that was truly disastrous. I really wish that book had been printed in black-&-white. It was a good story and I think the best Batman art I had drawn, but anyone who hasn't seen the art in black-&-white will have to take my word on that.

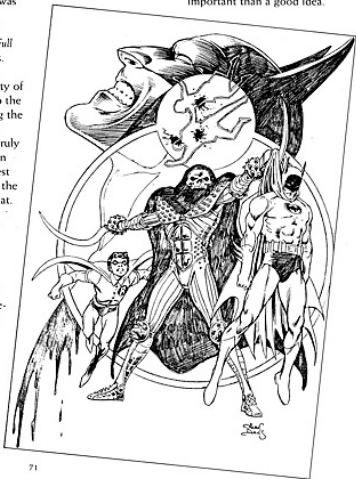
MM: When you came back for your second run on *Excalibur* you took over the writing chores as well. Were you having any reservations about that?

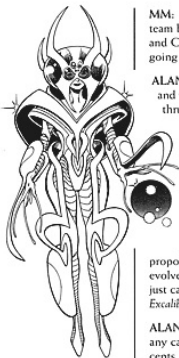
ALAN: Tons. There had been criticism about the sudden increase in the number of comic artists who were attempting to write their own books, and someone—a writer I believe—had cleverly described the writer/artists as *warts* on the industry. At that time I had only written a few "Captain Britain" episodes and co-written *Wolverine: Bloodlust* with Paul Neary, so I didn't feel too secure in my ability. Terry Kavanagh was, of course, key because he made the offer and believed I could pull it off. He was also an excellent editor because, although he was always extremely supportive and enthusiastic, he

told me the truth even when it was unpalatable. I think every creator needs that sort of detached overview. I'll often ask Mark Farmer for an opinion, although I don't usually need to ask. And Pat Prentice, too. Aside from being a terrific letterer, with the patience of a saint, Pat proofreads everything and will regularly spot mistakes I, and sometimes the editor, have missed. Everyone believes they have great ideas and it is invaluable, if not essential, to have someone you trust to deliver a harsh, critical truth. I had always relied very heavily on my brothers, Damian and Noel, for support and perspective. Now my son Thomas currently serves as my creative supervisor. He is a good artist and excellent storyteller and easily my harshest critic, next to myself.

MM: At some point around this time you were submitting proposals for various series in collaboration with Paul Neary, right?

ALAN: After the end of our first run on *Excalibur*. We sent proposals to DC, Marvel, and 2000 A.D. They were all rejected. I believe they were all good ideas but it was, and still is, reputations or perceived status that is more important than a good idea.





This Page: In a case of "bad timing" Alan and Paul Neary pitched a time-travelling super-group, *Warpforce*, to DC after their run on *Excalibur*. Two of the designs were later recycled in the pages of *Excalibur* as Cerise and the evolved Widget. Inks by Paul Neary.

Next Page: The *ClanDestine* pose for a family picture.

Amazo, Calendar Man™ and ©2003 DC Comics. Cerise, ClanDestine, Widget™ and ©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.

MM: One of the proposals looks to be a team book called *Warpforce*, with Amazo and Calendar Man as members. Was it going to be a villain-oriented book?

ALAN: Blurring the line between heroes and villains was one theme, but the main thrust of the series would have been about time travel and paradoxes. We had some really exciting and radical ideas, but the DC Universe had just gone through the *Crisis on Infinite Earths* and time travel had been officially ruled as no longer possible. Bad timing, I suppose.

MM: Two of the characters in the proposal art look like Cerise and the evolved Widget from *Excalibur*. Did you just carry over the characters into the *Excalibur* storyline?

ALAN: There wasn't any carry-over of the concepts. I liked the visual designs and as the storyline in *Excalibur* evolved, I had roles for characters that needed to be designed.

MM: When you wrapped up your run on *Excalibur* did you already have *ClanDestine* in mind as what you wanted to do next?

ALAN: I had absolutely no idea what I was going to do after finishing *Excalibur*. Writing and penciling a monthly book was hard work and I needed a break. I had offers of work from various sources, so I knew I had a safety net and time to consider the next move. The *ClanDestine* concept took a long time to evolve. Paul had promised me creative freedom but asked that I consider doing a group book. I had dozens of ideas but nothing even remotely original. I

don't think it is possible to come up with anything truly original, because the fantasy genre is an evolution that stretches back to ancient myths. The super-hero sub-genre is hugely overpopulated and new characters are invariably hybrids or composites of already existing characters. My idea with the *ClanDestine* was to use the cliché super-powered types—strong guy, agile guy, telepath—in a fresh way. The *Destine* family are neither heroes nor villains. They have powers and use them to benefit themselves. They feel no obligation to follow Spider-Man's "with great power comes great responsibility" creed.

MM: Was the original idea to keep them insulated in their own little universe, or did you plan all along to have them interact with the Marvel Universe characters?



ALAN: I wanted the best of both worlds. The concept wouldn't work if the Clan were regularly associating with mainstream heroes, but I wanted to be able to use the Marvel characters when it suited the story. If I had wanted to keep them completely separate I could easily have had them operating in their own non-Marvel universe.

MM: So the crossovers weren't done simply in an effort to boost sales of the book?

ALAN: It was nothing to do with sales. I had roughly plotted the episodes utilizing Spider-Man, Dr. Strange, and the Invaders before I began to pencil the first issue.

When I first told Paul about my idea for the *ClanDestine*, I described it as a cross between *The Addams Family* and the *Avengers*—he wasn't impressed so I explained further: "The Destinies are a super-powered family who hide from the public and selfishly use their powers for personal gain without breaking the law or attracting attention to themselves." After that pitch there was the sort of silence that is only broken by the distant howl of a lone coyote and the faint rasp of the wind gently pushing tumbleweed across a barren waste. So, to prove the basic concept had a lot of potential, I mapped out a long story of between 24-30 issues as part of the original *ClanDestine* proposal.

MM: Were you disappointed that it ended so quickly?

ALAN: I was very disappointed. I felt like I had only just started when everything went wrong. Which is really pretty much what happened. When I began work on the *ClanDestine*, comic sales still appeared healthy and Marvel UK was producing over 25 monthly titles. However, before the first issue of *ClanDestine* saw print, the industry-wide sales slump hit and Marvel UK was the first victim of the implosion. Marvel UK suddenly went from producing 25 titles to just one—*ClanDestine*—which, because of the collapse, would be published through Marvel US. No one really knew what was going on and much of what had been promised didn't materialize. There was no malice, it was just bad timing.

MM: How did you feel about *ClanDestine* going on without you those last few issues? Did you follow what they were doing with the book?



ALAN: I really didn't like them. The whole concept had been undermined and the long story I had planned was totally ignored. Fortunately, in the *X-Men/ClanDestine* book, I was able to have Rory "wake up in the shower" and it had all been a bad dream.

MM: How did the *WildCATs: Year One* offer come about?

ALAN: Scott Dunbier had asked me to write and draw a *Gen*™ *Bootleg* story arc but I declined. My experiences with *Warrior* and *Eclipse* have always made me pretty cagey about working for the so called "independents." Soon after, Scott offered Mark a chance to write an arc. Mark wanted to expand his repertoire and I agreed to pencil the story. Aside from a pretty tight deadline everything went extremely well so I was prepared to consider the *WildCATs: Year One* proposal.

MM: So what happened? Why didn't it happen?

ALAN: I have no idea. James Robinson wrote a good story and I penciled the first issue. Then I had a series of phone calls from the various editors, some having replaced others; first I was told to stop work then, later, I was asked to write the rest of the series. I phoned James to find out what was going on but he knew nothing. I told the last editor I had started the project with James and I was only prepared to continue with him. I never heard anything after that.

MM: What exactly was "Kraken's Wake"?

ALAN: When I first became involved in the strip that

eventually became the "Kraken's Wake," it was destined for *Omni Comix*, which was supposed to be a serious science/fi title. By the time I had finished the first issue and was half-way through the second, *Omni* magazine was canceled and *Penthouse Comix* was in trouble. The first issue of the "Kraken's Wake" eventually appeared in the *Penthouse Men's Adventure Comix*, but it was simply being used because it had been bought. There was no plan to continue it. In fact, the copyright was signed over to me by Dave Elliot when he wrapped things up.

MM: "Wildweed" was one of the proposals you worked on with Paul Neary. What was it about?

ALAN: "Wildweed" was Paul's creation. The strip was destined for a proposed teen magazine that would have been a comic strip insert. The publishers wanted an environmentally friendly angle to the content, so it was a tough brief. The story and characters Paul came up with were very funny. Unfortunately all that was ever produced were three pages for the dummy issue.

MM: There's something you sent me—it makes me smile every time I read it—called "Deadly Dangerous Dr. Dicky Dynamite, TNT." What a great name!

ALAN: Dicky to his friends, Deadly Dangerous or TNT to his enemies. [laughter] This was a proposal I sent to 2000 A.D. It was essentially a *Star Trek* "Dan Dare" spoof. The editors said they liked the idea but wanted one of their "proper" writers to write the series. Obviously I said no. I never completed any pages and it is extremely unlikely I ever will. The basic concepts were very similar to the *Galaxy Quest* movie. Ideas are very time-sensitive. If you don't strike while the iron is hot, someone else will. I tried a second proposal with 2000 A.D. some years later with Paul Neary called "Zondar Fritz." I finished the first episode on spec in the hope that the editors would be impressed and give me a formal go-ahead. We did indeed get approval, but months had passed, so Paul and I had moved on and nothing saw print.



MM: How did the *X-Men/ClanDestine* mini-series come about?

ALAN: I met up with Bob Harras in San Diego and talked about what I might do for Marvel. I said I would love to do more *ClanDestine* but accepted that the characters hadn't made enough impact to be viable. Bob offered the chance to do the mini-series.

MM: Were you excited about the chance to work with the characters again?

ALAN: Of course. They are my creation and I feel like I never really started to scratch the surface of their potential.

MM: Was the mini-series done in the hopes of garnering support for a relaunch of *ClanDestine*?

ALAN: There was never any mention by either Bob or myself, but the continuation of any series is a consideration if it is successful. As I have already said, I knew the series hadn't won a huge following, so a regular series was extremely unlikely.



I would love everything I do to be more successful, but I find it more fulfilling to do the stories I want to tell rather than chase trends and fashion. Having said that, in retrospect I think the *X-Men/ClanDestine* crossover might have been a bad idea because I had to completely reintroduce the Clan, and with all of the other elements involving the X-Men, I think the *ClanDestine* concept became too diluted. It was certainly an X-Men story guest-starring the Clan and wasn't really a good platform to show the strengths of the *ClanDestine*.

MM: Where did you get the idea for *The Nail*? Did you approach DC with the idea of doing an Elseworlds story?

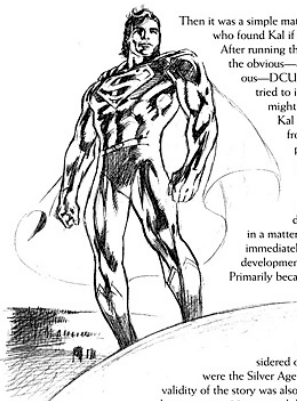
ALAN: At a comic convention in Glasgow in 1994, Archie Goodwin took Mark Farmer and I out to lunch and ran through a list of things we might consider doing for DC. Nothing really piqued my interest until he suggested a JLA Elseworlds. My first thought was that, in a JLA Elseworlds, I could draw the original Silver Age JLA. It took about 20 minutes to figure out how. As Mark and I walked back from lunch with Archie, I thought of various stories in the Elseworlds/*What If?* tradition to think of a twist I could use and I remembered Frank Capra's movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*. The central theme about the difference one man can make, or more importantly the absence of one man, seemed perfectly suited to Superman who was always the center of the DC Universe.



Above: Deadly Dangerous Dr. Dicky Dynamite, TNT and crew! Say that five times fast. Alas, when the editors of 2000 A.D. wanted to attach another writer to the project, Alan decided to put it on the shelf.

Lower Left: Wolverine versus... Sam! Samantha, that is, of the *ClanDestine*. Drawn for Mike Conroy.
Previous Pages: A young Grifter doing his thing in an unpublished page from *WildCATs: Year One*.

ClanDestine, Wolverine™ and ©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc. WildCATs™ and ©2003 Wildstorm Productions.



Then it was a simple matter of deciding who found Kal if the Kents didn't. After running through a list of the obvious—all too obvious—DCU candidates, I tried to imagine who might in reality find Kal and keep him from using his powers. The Amish! I had the first draft of the proposal written and delivered to DC in a matter of weeks, but it immediately went into development limbo.

Primarily because the JLA didn't have their own title at the time, so they were considered out of fashion, as were the Silver Age characters. The validity of the story was also put in question because one critic assumed the Amish had only settled in Pennsylvania. I photocopied a book I had researched on the Amish to prove they had in fact established communities as far apart as Canada and Kansas. I really gave up in the face of all the negativity and it wasn't until K.C. Carlson got involved, some years after I had submitted the proposal, that it moved forward. I am certain *The Nail* would never have happened if K.C. hadn't been so persistent in championing the project. K.C. was a good guy.

MM: Did you have as much fun working on it as it seems?

ALAN: It was tremendous fun but also very intense. The central story is ridiculously simple. The complexity comes from the layers of interaction, which was the fun part, but I had to be disciplined to ignore so many attractive diversions and to keep the plot in focus. The story structure had to be like a relay race. All of the individual vignettes are linked by a thread of information that is passed, like a baton, between the characters—ensuring that

each vignette moved the story forward.

MM: You initially started working on *Killraven* about this time as well, right?

ALAN: I was at a Marvel creators conference and Bob Harris asked me what I would like to do—this was after finishing the *X-Men/ClanDestine* book. I said I would love to do John Carter of Mars. Ben Raab, who was Bob's assistant at the time, said Marvel wouldn't be able to get the rights to it, because Dark Horse was currently doing a John Carter book. I think Bret Blevins was drawing it. So that was that. It was an informal chat at 2 o'clock in the morning in a bar, so I thought that would be the end of it. But at breakfast the next morning, Bob came down, just leaned over, and said, "Do you like *Killraven*? You could do a John Carter style story with *Killraven* without any of the complications from using an Edgar Rice Burroughs licensed character." Then he walked off saying, "Think about it." But I didn't need much time to think. It wasn't an idea I would ever have thought of, but it just seemed so right.

MM: So you were familiar with the

Above: Alan's entry for the *Superman* Gallery: "This was the first time I had drawn Superman. I endlessly reworked his face and the head grew as out of proportion as my obsession. 'Perfect' characters are much harder to draw than those with an interesting defect or a mask!" **Right:** A good-natured ribbing at the expense of Scott Lobdell and his fashion sense.

Superman™ and ©2003 DC Comics.



Killraven character at that point?

ALAN: Oh, yeah, definitely. I knew Killraven well.

MM: So what happened to delay the project?

ALAN: I should have been working on *Killraven* at the same time as *The Nail*, but a period of illness meant that I was going to have immediate deadline problems with *Killraven*. So I phoned Marvel and said, "I'm not going to be able to meet these deadlines, I'm going to have to drop out." Bob said, "It doesn't matter. Whenever you're ready we'll do it. Don't worry." Now, this period of illness had put me behind, and I suddenly realized that I wasn't going to have anything in print that year. As chance would have it, Mark Farmer phoned me as I was thinking this and said Adam Kubert had just dropped out of doing the *Fantastic Four*. Bob had asked me to do the *Fantastic Four* six months earlier, so I knew that he'd maybe be receptive to me doing it. So I phoned Bob and offered to do three issues. That was all, because I could fit them into my *Nail* deadline. I know there are all sorts of rumors of me falling out with Scott Lobdell, but they're not true. I like Scott. He taught me a lot about fashion. [laughter] So I did the three issues and then went back to doing *The Nail*. When I finished *The Nail*, I was burned out and not really looking forward to the level of commitment *Killraven* would require.

Again, fortunately, as I was thinking this Chris Claremont phoned and asked if I'd like to pencil six issues of the *X-Men*? Within about a week and a half of this, I realized there was something going on at Marvel, something political. I still don't know the full story. It was between Joe Kelly and Mark Powers, and I think Steven Seagle was involved, but I didn't really have anything to do with him. Only a

few weeks after beginning penciling, Mark Powers phoned and said Joe Kelly and Steven Seagle had quit, and asked if I'd help out by plotting the next issue. I said I would and sent a plot in. Mark phoned and said they really liked the plot and would I plot *Uncanny* as well? So I said okay, and then it was "can you plot next month's as well?" [laughter] I'd said there was no way I could manage to do the dialogue, so I just continued penciling one and plotting both *X-Men* titles and suddenly 18 months had passed and I'd penciled 11 issues and plotted 24 or more. I had sorted out all of the continuity stuff Mark had wanted so all the titles could be integrated—but there were a lot of new writers resisting the new line. More politics! But worst of all was the coloring—I decided to jump ship and went over to DC and started working on *Superboy's Legion*.

Shortly after that Tom Brevoort phoned and said, "Aren't you coming back to do *Killraven*?" I thought *Killraven* had maybe dropped off the map because I hadn't heard anything and assumed Marvel wasn't interested in doing that type of character with sales continuing to decline. Science-fiction has always been a notoriously poor seller,

Below: Alan describes this cover of *Showcase* as, "A Tommy Tomorrow cover, from a time when covers told a story." Regarding the pencil rough Alan says, "Tommy Tomorrow, the American Dan Dare, was a childhood favorite. I considered having Cosmic Boy wear a Planeteer uniform when he first appears in *Superboy's Legion*, but decided it would be confusing."

Legion of Super-Heroes, Tommy Tomorrow™ and ©2003 DC Comics.





Above: The rough sketch for the cover to *Avengers* #39.

Right: The "classic" *Avengers* as drawn for the 2001 Heroes Convention in Charlotte, NC.

Next Page: Two different versions of Spider-Man. Left, the Spider-Man Movie Adaptation cover. "I really didn't think this worked with painted color. The form, depth, and scale were completely lost." Right, the real Spider-Man. "I never saw this pin-up in print so I have no idea where it was published." Inks by Mark Farmer.

Avengers, Spider-Man™ and ©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.

and I never expected *Killraven* to do well in sales. Then Tom said, "Well, actually, we're just losing George Pérez, do you think you could fill in on *Avengers* for a little while?" I said, "I'll do six issues—pencils—but that's absolutely all. I'm not going to do plotting or anything." Tom said, "No, no,

it's all right. Kurt's going to be doing it." So I agreed to do six issues of the *Avengers*. While I was waiting for the first plot to come I penciled the first issue of *Killraven*. Now this was mid-to-late 2000. When I finished *Avengers* I immediately returned to *Killraven*. I was determined to get it finished before taking on anything else. I penciled the second and half of the third issues—this was the summer of 2001. Then Ralph Macchio phoned and asked if I'd like to do the *Spider-Man Movie Adaptation*. I said, "Absolutely no way. I'm not going to do it. I've messed Tom about too much." Ralph said, "No, I've already seen Tom and Tom knows this is important to Marvel and he says it's okay for you to do it." I said, "I should really stick with *Killraven*." And then Ralph said, "Stan Lee's doing the plot."

MM: There you go.

ALAN: I just thought, "Well that would be nice just to say once I worked on the same book as Stan Lee, especially on *Spider-Man*." The only thing better than that would be maybe a *Silver Surfer*/Fantastic Four story. So the fanboy took over and I said I'd do it. Unfortunately it didn't work out as well as I would have liked, but that's showbiz!

MM: So *Killraven* has been long in the making.

ALAN: Yeah, I actually told Tom that I was getting the feeling Marvel didn't really want me to do it. They created all of the delays.

MM: Did you work closely with Tom on this then?

ALAN: I didn't discuss things with him too much. I sent him the plots and he was always very supportive, but in general he just let me carry on. When I sent the first plot in to Tom I said, "I'm not really sure what I'm trying to do." He just said, "Well, I'll tell you when you go wrong." So I just got on with chasing the story. It was the same as when I did *The Nail*, I had a very,

very simple idea, and it was more about the execution of the idea rather than the idea itself. *Killraven* has a lot of themes and ideas running through it. The sci-fi/post-apocalyptic backdrop is the fun part. The locations are crucial to the story.

But primarily it's about adventure and it's about characters, though more than anything it's about having fun.

MM: And, really, I think that's what really encapsulates your work over the years—the fun aspects of comic books.



ALAN: I've had people over the years saying to me, "Why do you give yourself so much work? If I were writing my own stories I would write a lot less for myself to draw." But I tend to think of a story and then suffer the consequences in the amount of time I've got to take to draw it. I do like to challenge myself when I'm drawing; I like to introduce items I might never have drawn before just so I can learn to draw better. One of the real dangers of drawing super-hero comics is you just have to draw the same things over and over again. When I did *ClanDestine* I would introduce things like cats and horses and different locations just so I would be drawing something different. I think that you can become very lazy as a super-hero artist, because you just start rubber-stamping images.

MM: Was *Killraven* a chance to stretch?

ALAN: Yeah. I think every project I've ever gone on to is about trying to find some way of increasing the challenge and learning something new. When I first started working in comics I didn't know how to pencil and ink, really. I knew I could draw, but I didn't know really how to draw work that was

camera-ready. Once I learned that I started to get bored inking just because it took me so long. So then I started to think about writing, and once you start writing you figure out how to do a particular type of story. Then you start to mess around with storytelling trying to see if you can do something a little bit different. That's what keeps me going—trying to do something different.

MM: This past January was like Alan Davis month with you penciling four books—*Killraven*, which you also wrote; *Thor*; *Iron Man*; and *Avengers*—out in the same month. Was that a little weird for you?

ALAN: Yeah. I hadn't considered what to do after *Killraven* because *Killraven* had been on hold since 1997, and every time I was near completion on one of the assignments that had kept me away from it, I wouldn't think about taking on another job because *Killraven* was waiting in the wings. After five years, it had become a habit. *Killraven* #5 was almost finished before I really started to give my next assignment any serious thought. And then it was only because editors from other companies, who I had previously declined work from, reminded me my





Above: A fantastic four of a kind from the 2001 Bristol Con charity card deck.

Next Page: Batman and Dredd go "toe-to-toe" in this drawing for the UKCAC. Inks by Mark Farmer.

Batman™ and ©2003 DC Comics. Fantastic Four™ and ©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc. Judge Dredd™ and ©2003 2000 A.D.

commitment to *Killraven* was almost over. It is nice to have a choice but it also complicates things. Any commitment will impact from six months to a year of my life, so it isn't a decision to be taken lightly. Tom offered me the three-part Avengers story, and a straightforward penciling assignment appealed to me as both a change of pace and of taking time to consider my next step.

MM: Was it difficult at all working with three different writers on one story?

ALAN: Yes. I think it would have been easier if we had all three plots in hand before I started penciling the first one. Art is so much more specific than text. All sorts of abstract anomalies can be hidden in text. Art is black or white, no pun intended; a thing either is or isn't. Of all art forms, comic art is the least ambiguous. I didn't feel I did the best I could have done on the three-part story. The deadlines were obviously tight and I had sent off the completed pencils for the first half of *Thor* before I saw the *Iron Man* script, and I had started on *Iron Man* before I saw the *Avengers* script. I don't know if the reader will be aware of all the things I had to fudge along the way. I hope not. But I do regret all of the missed opportunities.

MM: And now you're working on a follow-up to *The Nail*. Was that something you approached DC with or did they

come to you?

ALAN: Peter Tomasi had been chasing me to do something for DC. He wasn't really too interested in a sequel to *The Nail*, but it was something I had thought about for some time and, thankfully, when Peter read my proposal he was won over. I like Peter—he's one of the good guys.

MM: Can you say anything about the sequel without giving too much away?

ALAN: The story follows on organically from the first series. It isn't so much a sequel as a conclusion. When I wrote the first series I had a number of ideas that wouldn't fit and it would have been wrong to spoil the story by jamming them in. Over the years the various ideas and notions had time to percolate in the back of my mind and eventually resolved themselves into a story that really ties up all of the loose ends from the first series. I have written all of the plots and penciled the first quarter of the first book and I'm having a lot of fun.

Interlude 3: Mark Farmer

MM: The first job you worked on with Alan was the last "Captain Britain" story, correct?

MARK FARMER: Yes, February 1986.

MM: Do you remember how you got that job?

MARK: I think Alan had grown tired of inking his own stuff. I don't think Paul was available at the time. I think Alan must have seen my early stuff in some fanzine somewhere. I may have had a little bit of professional work, not a great deal, for 2000 A.D. and Marvel UK at that time. Maybe he saw some potential there. [laughter]

We didn't get off to a great start. I don't think he was too pleased with what I did on that job. I look at that job in horror now and I'm surprised Alan even spoke to me again, let alone allowed me to touch his pencils. But he took the time to point out where he felt there was room for improvement—it was a *loony* conversation—and I'm sure his advice helped me to become a better inker, not only on his stuff, naturally, but on other pencils as well.

MM: What he said was that he gave you very loose breakdowns thinking you'd easily interpret what his squiggles meant.

MARK: I think he was being overly generous. [laughter] If I remember correctly, his pencils were pretty tight and I just didn't do a very good job on them. I was very nervous, as you can probably appreciate.

MM: So at that stage of your career, that was a pretty high profile job?

MARK: I think so, yeah, 'cause I was well aware of Alan's work and talent. As an inker you look for the pencils you think you might be able to compliment, and just keep an open mind—you may work with these people one day, you may not. Then if the opportunity

arises, try not to upset that penciler's intentions. At the same time, there are many pencilers who just fill the pages with "stuff" with no forethought as to the storytelling, pacing, how one panel/page relates to another, or how the eye may be moved across the page. By the same token, I'm certain there are many pencilers out there who feel that my inking would not complement their work at all. My stuff's always had that polish to it, that slickness as it's called. And I'd always felt, with the arrogance of youth, that I could do Alan's pencils justice—that I was the one who could help him out in what I thought was his weakest area. Alan asks that I pay attention to the hands and faces—keep strictly to his pencils. And though I've got plenty of leeway in backgrounds and such, to be honest there's no need, his pencils are so finished. If I was to add anything to them it would just be making work for myself and busying things up unnecessarily.

MM: Had you started inking *Green Lantern* by then?

MARK: My first work for American comics was inking Dave Gibbons on a couple of issues of *Green Lantern*, in October '87.

MM: Right.

MARK: And of course that was very exciting, 'cause I was a fan of Dave's stuff and DC were the comics I read as a child and *Green Lantern* was always one of my favorite characters if not my favorite. So having that land in my lap was exciting and if that resulted in working with Alan for a few years, all well and good.

MM: Did you meet Alan when you worked together on that "Captain Britain" job or had you met him before?

MARK: We'd met—we've spoken about not being able to remember the first time we actually met. I think we just, like, bumped into each other at a venue in London





called the Westminster Comic Mart. Professionals used to go over there—budding professionals, lots of fans—it was very informal and casual. There was no bumping of egos, we just helped each other out and passed advice on and got each other work if possible. People always had samples, folders of current work, or samples of what they wanted to get into. We'd usually meet in the pub after the Mart, about five o'clock or so. If friends wanted to go out for a meal and a drink you'd meet downstairs. First Brian Bolland had invited me downstairs to show him some children's books I'd illustrated, and that was when Dave Gibbons approached me to do the *Green Lanterns*—the first time I'd been invited downstairs where the professionals went. [laughter]

One thing led to another, but I know I met Alan in the pub near by the Mart at some point and we talked. He was probably most familiar with my work from working with Mike Collins for a few years, putting samples together as a penciler/inker team, which wasn't really the done thing in this country. As you know, in Britain most artists tend to ink themselves. It was very uncommon before people started working for American comics. Yeah, that's where we met, but it wasn't like, "Oh, Alan, I'm pleased to meet you. How do you do?" There wasn't an actual introduction like that. We just spoke to each other casually and struck up a friendship from there.

MM: So you hit it off pretty early then?

MARK: I think so. I think we share some values in comics and life in general that you don't always get with other people. Our tastes in comics are pretty similar. As with a lot of people, we feel that the comics we grew up with will always be the best. And we get a certain buzz out of working on characters that we like. We've worked on *Fantastic Four* and the *Justice League*, the *Silver Surfer*—even if it may be only for a couple of panels, just to say you've done your version of it. I know Alan does his version and I live vicariously off his excitement. It can backfire sometimes. When we did our short run on *Avengers*, we were hoping for a chance to draw the "classics"—Thor, Captain America, Iron Man, the Vision, etc. However, we ended up drawing a lot of the second string characters, not the heroes you automatically associate with the title, *The Avengers*, so that was a big disappointment.

MM: How long do you think it was before people said Alan Davis and Mark Farmer in the same breath, as a team?

MARK: Well, Alan worked for a few good years with Paul before asking me to help him out. He's very loyal to the people he works with and he asks for that loyalty in return. As an inker, in the past—the circumstances have changed now that I've got a young family—I was able to work a bit quicker than Alan, not doing as much thinking about the work as he does when he designs a page and dramatizes a story. So I would take on other jobs alongside Alan's stuff. That's not the case now, unfortunately. I think Alan makes it quite clear to editors that we are a team. If they take on Alan, they generally take Mark Farmer as well,

which is nice. [laughter] I don't think many people have actually asked Alan to do much work without automatically considering me as the inker. Some years ago there was an issue of *X-Men* Alan did that was inked by somebody else and, to be honest, it was barely recognizable as Alan's stuff. He was really displeased with that, so I think he values setting up an established relationship with an inker who at least tries to meet his high demands. [laughter]

MM: Exactly. Now you do pencil from time to time....

MARK: Ohhhh. [laughter]

MM: It's few and far between, but you do pencil some. Do you approach inking yourself differently from inking another artist?

MARK: I find it really hard to leave pencils alone, which is probably why I was drawn to inking. And I must admit, my penciling is pitiful. I make the excuse that it's all down to lack of practice. [laughter] I had the intention of

making a career as a commercial illustrator before getting into comics. After a long layoff in my early teenage years, I just sort of fell back into comics. I won't say I actively pursued it, but once the door opened it was great. "I can't believe I'm doing this. This is a dream come true." For most people working in England, working in American comics was beyond a dream—it would never happen, it was a dream too far. When I came to start penciling comics I found that I couldn't leave the pencils in their unfinished stages. Something about the way they smudge, I just didn't like leaving pencils to stand on their own and I fell into the trap of trying to ink stuff before I'd properly finished penciling and the results got poorer and poorer. I'm not that disciplined when it comes to penciling. I treat it entirely the wrong way. It's a different mindset from when you're inking and I'd really need to concentrate a lot more than I think I ever have before. Not nice to admit, but unfortunately true. [laughter]

Previous Page: From cover rough to finished inks. Note that poses and camera angles can change in the process. Cover to *Excalibur* #42, inked by Mark Farmer.

Below: Another "before and after," this time for the cover of *Excalibur* #46. Inks by Mark Farmer.

Excalibur, Meggan™ and ©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.





Above: This was one of many passes at the cover for *Legion of Super-Heroes* #100 that were rejected. Alan says it's a "looming story."

Next Page: Cover sketch for *Superboy's* *Legion* #1.

Legion of Super-Heroes, *Superboy*™ and ©2003 DC Comics.

writing in comics between us. And then Scott Dunbier asked Alan if he'd work for Wildstorm. He mentioned that *Gen*" was producing a second title but Alan felt he was too busy. I can't remember what else we were working on at the time, but he couldn't do it. Scott was trying to encourage us to do the first issues 'cause he said the launch would be big and would start off with big royalties. Alan said to me, "Well, you're very good at slagging other people off. Why don't you try writing it yourself?" So I did! [laughter] But because I agreed on the deadline for the first issue—which Alan said I was crazy to do—it was very rushed and didn't really finish in a very satisfactory way. So Alan ended up bailing me out. I can't take much credit for the ending of that story, and I think, structurally, it's not the way Alan would have told the story, but he wanted me to learn by my mistakes. There's no better way of doing it than seeing it there in print.

MM: That's basically the way Alan said

MM: And you're a bit of a writer now, too. You did a story for *A-t* way back, and of course you worked with Alan on *Gen*': *Bootleg*. How did the *Gen*'' project come about? With very little writing experience, how did you convince them you should be the writer?

MARK: It was basically Alan. We were bad-mouthing the quality of some of the

Paul Neary worked with him when he was starting out, was letting him see his mistakes in print.

Your next writing job was *Superboy's* *Legion*. Before that you and Alan had done covers for a while on *Legion of Super-Heroes*. Was that a special assignment for you? I know you're a big fan of the *Legion*.

MARK: Well, we had a good relationship with K.C. Carlson, the editor at the time. He asked us to do the covers and Alan agreed basically 'cause he knew I was a big fan of the *Legion of Super-Heroes*. We did a small 9-page story in *Legion of Super-Heroes* #100, which I wrote. And of course being only a 9-page story it was small and tight and I think I did okay on that one. Alan added a few little flourishes in the artwork as he tends to do and that was an enjoyable experience.

Because of the uncertainty of the future of inking with new technology coming in, Alan has tried to encourage me to do more writing. Again, with a young family I managed to write the *Legion of Super-Heroes* short story before my daughters were born, but now they're here they take up so much time. It's something I'd love to pursue, but I really haven't got the time. It's hard enough inking an issue a month these days without taking on other projects. I think DC's stopped doing Elseworlds now and they've got a good regular team on the *Legion of Super-Heroes*. So if I ever start pitching ideas again, I don't think *Legion's* too bright a prospect for me. [Editor's note: Since the time of this interview, Mark has become the regular inker on *Legion of Super-Heroes*.]

MM: Did you have another idea kicking around as follow-up?

MARK: Yeah, I submitted a sequel to *Superboy's* *Legion*—and that arrived just as the policy was sent down from the top of DC that Elseworlds were being scrapped. "They're not selling. They're not making any money for DC." And it's a shame, because we did two issues of *Superboy's* *Legion* and I always felt that if we could do a sequel it would make a nice trade paperback package. I know a lot of people who couldn't get the second issue, so they don't know how the story finished.

MM: I've got the first but not the second.

MARK: Well, there you go, you see. I don't know, I just think it's just money sitting in the bank for DC if they'd just let us to do another one. [laughter]

MM: I think the thing with the Elseworlds is when they first started they did really well, because they did one every three or four months. Then they got to the point where they were doing two or three a month.

MARK: Yep. It was felt they were giving those jobs to creators between other projects. "Oh, here's an Elseworlds to keep you going," rather than making it something that really counted.

MM: It really became watered down in a lot of cases.

MARK: I can understand why they've stopped them.

MM: But then you would have a really good one come along like *JLA: The Nail* or *Superboy's Legion*, *Superman: War of the Worlds*, and some others that made you realize the potential Elseworlds had if they just were more selective in what they published.

MARK: That's right. Alan and I are still getting royalties off *The Nail* trade paperback!

MM: Where did your idea for *Superboy's Legion* come from? Was it something you thought up back when you were working on the covers or did you have to sit down and think about it?

MARK: Well I'd always wanted to use the original Legion with their costumes that always seemed to glow on those gorgeous Curt Swan covers and have lovingly entered my subconscious mind so that my heart misses a beat whenever my eyes catch the briefest glimpse of those characters. I didn't tweak too much. There are

little slants that make them slightly different. Some of their power levels are altered. Now, when you think Matter Eater Lad, how useful is that power? [laughter] So some were dropped for convenience, some had their powers boosted a little bit, but there were literally thousands of ideas when you're given a blank sheet of paper and told "here, do a Legion of Super-heroes story." And I think it was Alan again who suggested, "Hey, how about this one. Superboy, instead of landing in the 20th

Century, isn't discovered until the 30th Century and the Legion had never been created." That was literally the starting off point and I just threw in all the little things that I would have loved to have read as a kid. I know there's a certain pace to the story—even though I trimmed away a hell of a lot—it was almost a backlash to some of the pacing that was in stories at the time, where not a great deal happens—lots of talking heads—and we just wanted every page to have something happening. It's the same as on the *Killraven* we're working on now, you know. Alan may have told that he's a big fan of the John Carter of Mars books by Edgar Rice

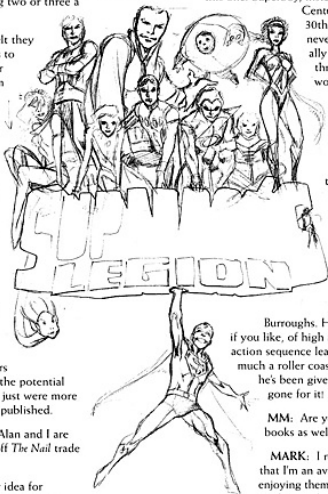
Burroughs. His *Killraven* story is in that style, if you like, of high adventure—escapades, one action sequence leading into the next—pretty much a roller coaster ride. It's what he likes and he's been given the freedom to do, and he's gone for it!

MM: Are you a fan of the John Carter books as well?

MARK: I read them years ago. I can't say that I'm an avid fan although I remember enjoying them when I was younger. I'm looking at them—they're still on my bookshelf even as we're speaking. I must go back and read them one day. I preferred Michael Moorcock and Robert E. Howard stories. I seemed better able to visualize the stories they were telling.

MM: Is that where you kind of lean as well? I know Alan's kind of that way, where he enjoyed fantasy and science-fiction maybe more than super-heroes.

MARK: I've got no objection to either. I like super-hero



Below: The image at right was drawn/traced from the pencils for the cover of *LSH* #80, shown at left. Alan recalls, "This was my favorite *LSH* cover and I decided to keep the original. I felt guilty because I knew Mark would like it, but not guilty enough to give it to him. So, I traced the layout using Mark's favorite versions of the *LSH* costumes and he inked it."

Legion of Super-Heroes™ and
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stories for what they are just the same as a good action/adventure story. What I can't see the point of is a super-hero action/adventure story where people don't do anything super-heroic and there's no action or adventure. You know, what's the point? Why bother? I enjoyed reading *Preacher*, but why was it a comic? The least visually exciting story I've ever read. Vertigo comics, as fine as they are, have their market and some stuff only belongs in the Vertigo stable, but there seems to be a crossing over at the moment. The Vertigo ideal seems to be seeping into super-hero comics and to me it doesn't make a very good Vertigo comic and it doesn't make a very good Marvel/DC super-hero comic.

MM: You said you would like to get back to writing at some point, maybe when your daughters are a little older?

MARK: Quite possibly, if I'm not bed-

ridden by then. [laughter] Yeah, yeah, I'd love to. Every day I walk my dogs in the park for an hour or so and when I'm not reading a book or sheltering from the rain, I'm jotting ideas down for stories in a little black book I've got in my pocket that might see the light of day sometime in the future.

MM: Would you ever consider drawing your own stories or just talking Alan into doing them with you?

MARK: Well, I wished I had that influence over Alan, but he's always been his own man, only doing the jobs that really interest. I'd have to convince myself that I was up to a competent standard of penciling before I even approached any professional company with samples or ideas. And, as I say, that's just not possible at the moment, but you can never say never. We'll have to see what the future brings.



Part 4: Storytelling and the Creative Process

MM: When you were doing that last *Captain Britain* story for Marvel UK, you only drew breakdowns for Mark Farmer to ink over.

ALAN: Well, loose pencils.

MM: That was atypical for you, right? That was the first time you had done that?

ALAN: It was the first time I'd had anyone ink my work other than Garry Leach. He'd inked a couple of my "Marvelman" issues, but that was a case of me penciling it specifically for Garry to ink. With Mark it was simply that I didn't have time to ink it myself and there was a really tight deadline. It was the first time I'd gotten unfinished pencils to anyone. My pencils have gotten much tighter over the years.

MM: When you're inking yourself do you leave it fairly loose or do you pencil tight as you've become accustomed to doing?

ALAN: It really depends on what the image is and what's being asked for. I can ink on top of a very basic breakdown if it's a sketch—I'll knock it in very quickly, sometimes with felt tips. If I'm doing a commissioned page I usually do very tight pencils for myself, because people expect my ink work to look the way it looks when it's inked by other people. My own inks tend to be quite crude.

MM: I've noticed on some of the jobs you've inked yourself, it looks very similar to the way Mark Farmer inks you. Paul Neary tends to show up in his inks over your pencils, but Mark seems to be a lot closer to the way you ink yourself. Do you see that, too, or do you see more differences?

ALAN: I think Mark might be offended. [laughter] Because he is absolutely the slickest inker—and far, far more adept than

I could ever be.

MM: I mean in terms of approach to shading and line weight and so on. You seem to ink with the same mindset.

ALAN: The problem with discussing how I work with Mark and Paul is that they can both ink far better than I and, like someone discussing old girlfriends, a compliment to one can sound like a criticism of the other. The reality is you can't really compare. When Paul first inked my work, more than 15 years ago, I was still learning to draw fairly basic things—perspective, musculature, etc.—and there were occasions when Paul would fix things in the inks—he is an excellent artist in his own right. Also, Paul had never inked anyone else before, so we were both learning. By the time I started working with Mark on a regular basis, I had a lot more experience and he was already a seasoned inker.

Mark and I have now worked together for considerably longer than I worked with Paul, so we are undoubtedly more in sync, and the way we work together has evolved to complement each other. I have the attention span of a butterfly so my focus, for want of a better word, is on the

Below: Alan drew a series of gag panels for the Glasgow Con (this one is from 1990) depicting a certain disruptive gent—who shall remain nameless here—in various degrading situations.





Above: The sketch for Alan's contribution to Marvel's *Heroes* tribute book. It was later inked by Robin Riggs.

Below: A rare treat! Alan as inked by Dave Gibbons in this UKCAC drawing.

Next Page: At one point Alan was tapped to illustrate the Batman/Judge Dredd crossover. "I dropped out after months of contract wrangles, but in the interim I drew a story entitled, 'The Bat Mugged' for 2000 A.D., as a warm-up on Dredd." Shown here is the cover and an excerpted panel from Alan's only go at Judge Dredd to date.

Superman™ and ©2003 DC Comics. Silver Surfer, Thor™ and ©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc. Judge Dredd™ and ©2003 2000 A.D. Thor/Superman art-work ©2003 Alan Davis & Dave Gibbons.

big picture, thinking about what happened previously and what happens next, and I often miss important details. Mark is far more focused and accurate than I am, which is crucial with the move towards more illustrative art in comics. Mark is undoubtedly the slickest inker in comics, as anyone who has ever seen an original inked page will know, and that's the reason why he is sought after by the likes of Adam Hughes and Adam Kubert.

Unfortunately, because of the unsympathetic

nature of the publishing process, I don't think the full quality of what Mark does ever completely survives to the printed page. He has a control, sensitivity, and attention to detail that is beyond most inkers, and certainly far beyond me.

My favorite stage of drawing is the initial wild roughs that hold so much energy and potential. The tightening up and finish is hard work. When Paul and I were working together, meeting a deadline was always the priority and the quality of reproduction was, by modern standards, very crude. Nowadays it isn't uncommon for an artist to spend three days to a week on a page of pencils. Is that sensible? It doesn't matter, that's the level of competition. The bottom line is, I am very difficult to work with because I will ignore the 99.999% of what is right and obsess over some minuscule deficiency. I may be a fanatic but I'm a realist and I know I have been incredibly lucky that both Mark and Paul put up with me, let alone dedicated

themselves to making the most of my pencils.

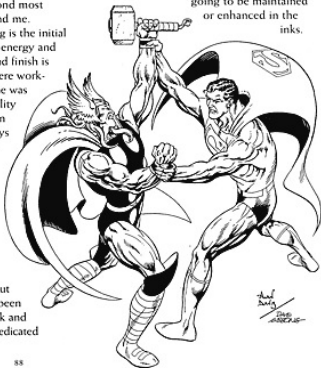
MM: Do you feel comfortable working with any other inkers?

ALAN: I've only really worked with a few. I did something with Dan Green; he inked over an issue of *X-Men* which should have gone to Paul, but because of politics it ended up with Dan. I didn't really think that worked very well. I also had a short story that Joe Rubinstein inked—a "She-Hulk" short story. It worked a lot better. I'm a great admirer of Joe's inks. Robin Riggs, of course. Robin did half of the '96 *X-Men Annual* and he also inked the Silver Surfer piece that we did for the *Heroes* book for Marvel. And recently he inked the issues of *Thor* and *Iron Man*. Robin is good.

MM: Is that by design? Do you prefer working with someone you're accustomed to? Do you request your inkers?

ALAN: Well, I tend to like to work as a partnership with an inker so that we know what we're trying to achieve. In both cases with Paul and Mark, we were friends first and then started to work as a team later. It's knowing that what I put on the page is

going to be maintained or enhanced in the inks.





The inker is in a very powerful position. Their work is what survives onto the printed page; the pencils are erased. So you really want someone who's being faithful to the spirit of the pencils. Whether they're being faithful to the detail or not isn't as important as the spirit.

MM: You started out inking *Batman & the Outsiders* yourself. Is that because you had the time to do it then? Do you prefer inking yourself?

ALAN: It wasn't so much that I had the time, but that I was used to doing it that way. At the time I was maybe penciling and inking a page as quickly as I pencil a page nowadays, maybe even faster. Because the standard of work that was required at that point was far cruder. Comics were still newsprint, and there was no point in putting detail into your work because often the lines would just disappear. When I started working for Marvel I ran into the Flexigraphic process that they were experimenting with at the time, and sometimes 25% of my linework would just disappear, depending on what point in the print run

you got the comic from. As technology improved the expected standard of comics rose, it became more illustrative. When I first started working in comics, a commercial artist—a professional—was someone who was cheap, reliable, and punctual. I hoped that once I was established I would be in a position to improve the standard and choice of my work.

MM: You started out drawing for black-&-white comics, but when you moved on to American comics you had to deal with color. Did you have to change your thinking in any way?

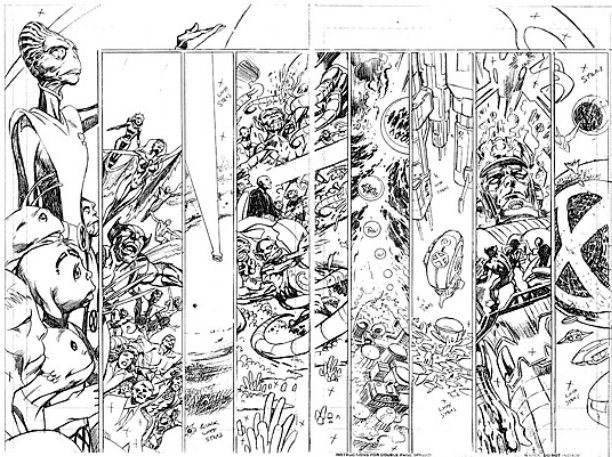
ALAN: I think I should have more than I did. [laughter] When I first started, I thought it was simply a case of dropping out some of the black and not putting so much shading in and hoping the colorist would put more in. But I think that was not really the right way to go. I'm still not really a hundred percent sure how to handle it, because especially the current coloring—

MM: The Photoshop techniques.

ALAN: Yeah, it's overpowering. You often get the colorist trying to redraw the artwork. I would've felt happier if I'd managed to team up with a colorist—someone who really cared about what they were doing. I feel I've been poorly served with a lot of the colorists that I've had over the years. It's usually people that are looking at a stopwatch while they're coloring a page and trying to get it done as quickly as possible. I do understand the commercial practicalities, but it is still disappointing.

MM: When you painted the covers for *Captain Britain*, they were mostly done in muted tones. Was that due to the printing or is that the type of palette you prefer?





When you did *Wolverine: Bloodlust*, Bernie Jaye used those same types of muted tones as well.

ALAN: I don't like bright, garish colors. I think garish colors fragment the artwork, and I like things to be harmonized. So I like the palette to have a base color that harmonizes the rest of the colors. It's a subject that could fill a book, or many books, because color has so much potential to contribute or destroy the artwork—and the story!

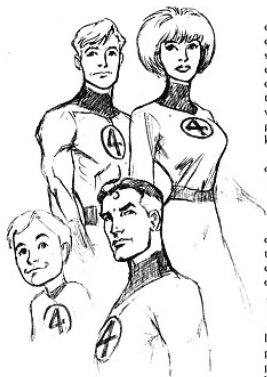
MM: We mentioned the Photoshop techniques and how they're doing more shading and things in the coloring. Do you prefer to keep it flatter or do you think those techniques can be useful?

ALAN: I can see how they can be useful, but I also am more concerned by how destructive they are. Because if the colorist isn't paying attention to the story—if they're just slavishly applying a technique that makes their work look like a fireworks display—to me that's destructive. There was one particular issue of *X-Men* which I've

harped on about over the years. The cover had Captain Marvel, Adam Warlock, and Thunderbird on it. The Captain Marvel figure has 38 white highlights on it. Now to get these white highlights, the rest of the colors had to be dark enough so the highlights would show up as real glows. What that means is the rest of the artwork is rendered so darkly that some of the tones actually obscure the black line. It's an overbearing technique that makes the figure look like backlit porcelain.

MM: They block in the line art.

ALAN: Yeah. You'll sometimes see in a comic where a face is modeled and the black line light source is ignored or the expression is ignored, and the colorist redraws the entire face in a color which prints up so darkly as to contradict the black line. If the colors are printed up in a muted way they're less destructive, just as a rule of thumb. The problem is I can't rely on what might happen, so I learned to draw defensively in an attempt to limit what can go wrong.



expensive separators to honor this bulk contract they were locked into. I understand the commercial consideration, but I detest the politics and worst of all, the new colorist and separators managed to produce the ugliest comics I have been involved with. Mark and I drew some of the best pages of our partnership, but you wouldn't know it from the printed page.

I know I am a perfectionist and am often told that I expect too much, but I know what is possible and there have been some pretty good jobs. Bernie's work on *Wolverine: Bloodlust* was very nice. Helen Nally had a wonderful color sense on *ClanDestine*, but the separators really let us down. Patricia Mulvihill did some really nice work on *The Nail*, especially in the first two issues. The *Fantastic Four* job by Liquid is memorable, especially a French edition I have which was printed on very high quality paper. In general it looks far superior to the US print—some of the tones are so much purer that the colors look different. Greg Wright has done some really nice work on *Killraven*. I'm sure it isn't to everyone's taste because I asked for some weird stuff as part of setting the mood in each chapter, but so far Greg has pulled most of it off.

There are even a few pages where I feel like my art has let him down. Still, I doubt if I'll ever be 100% happy with any color job. I like the power of black-&-white art and my earliest experiences of color in British comics set a standard that may never be equaled.

MM: When you're working with an established series like *Avengers* or *Fantastic Four*, do you tweak costumes here and there or do you try to stay with the established look?

Previous Page: An incredible two-page spread from *X-Men* #98. Alan considers his work with Mark Farmer on *X-Men* as some of the very best of their long partnership.

This Page: Alan's design work in preparation for his run on *Fantastic Four*.

Fantastic Four, *X-Men*™ and ©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.

MM: Will you ever give suggestions to the colorist or do you just leave it in their hands?

ALAN: I've tried all sorts, from giving the colorist free rein to sending the colorist very detailed notes—and some colorists just choose to completely ignore them. Other times the colorist has done exactly what I've asked, but then the separator completely ignores what the colorist has asked for. I've at times just completely given up on asking for anything because it's so soul-destroying. I think the lowest spot was my run on *X-Men* where Mark Powers asked me if whether I was happy with what Liquid was doing, and I said I was except for a few specific things—like the *X-Men* cover I mentioned previously. These weren't major things, but I had been asked not to contact Liquid directly and I simply hoped to fine tune what was in general a great color job. What I didn't realize until months later, when I saw an issue that was no longer colored by Liquid, was that Marvel had a quota deal with a separator in Ireland and they were looking for an excuse to take books away from the, presumably, more





Above: This "sketch for a friend" shows the Scarlet Witch in a slightly more revealing version of her original costume. Lucky friend!

Right: Alan's favorite of his *Flash* covers.

Next Page Top: Two rejected covers for *LSH*. #71's cover was passed over for "Option B." The cover for #95 had to be rethought out because the story was changed and the initial sketch's concept no longer fit the new story.

Far Right: *Excalibur* #55's cover was treated as the issue's splash page. Unique ideas like this helped make *Excalibur* a whole lot of fun.

Flash, Legion of Super-Heroes™ and ©2003 DC Comics. Captain Britain, Pyroche, Scarlet Witch™ and ©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.

ALAN: Well, with the *Fantastic Four* I wanted to go back to the original costumes, but editorial wanted them updated slightly. So as a compromise I moved the "4" up to the neckpiece and gave them a couple of bits on their gloves and belts. But I wanted to try and stay as close as possible to the original. With the *Avengers* I asked to change the Scarlet Witch just because I didn't feel the design George Pérez created worked with my drawing style. I tend to go for simpler, more open lines and don't do lots of detail in rendering. When I drew my version of the Pérez Scarlet Witch it just looked like a woman wrapped up in blankets. It didn't work at all. I wanted to return to the original Scarlet Witch, but a compromise was reached.

MM: How do you approach a series when you're drawing only the covers, like with *The Flash*? Are there any differences than with books where you're also drawing the interiors?

ALAN: Covers can be a nightmare. Some editors will demand three sketches and will pick the best, but sometimes there is a committee and they'll want an element from one and something else from another and the background from the third. And you can end up getting into sort of stupid negotiations. Other editors will say they want something radical and eye-catching that sums up the story and they talk in grand, brave terms, but then when you give them exactly what they requested they'll knock it back because what they really want is just a figure running out at the reader. The few *Flash* covers where the Flash isn't running out tended to be a bit of a negotiation. I can understand why the cover format is so limited because the cover isn't part of the story, it's something to try and attract a reader's eye. But I prefer covers that are relevant to the story rather than a pose or a stock shot of a character.

MM: Is it harder to do that when you're not doing the interiors? Aren't you doing the covers before the interiors are done?

ALAN: Most times you are because they need it for the catalogue. Doing the *Flash* covers, I was actually being sent Mark Waid's plots to read and look for an image that might sum up the story. The *Legion* covers were a combination of seeing plots, ideas from the editor or writer, and once even a cover sketch from the cover editor. There were times when the committee process used up most of the production time and the art had to be rushed. On the *LSA* covers, Peter Tomasi usually had a very, very specific idea so that it only ever took one sketch to get an agreement. I prefer to work with people who know what they want. I hate the "I have no idea what I want, but do something to impress me" editors. The sort of covers I like best are the ones that are specific to the character of the book, like *Flash* #83, the Flash running against the clock, *LSH* #80, the Legion flyby, *ClanDestine* #0, the group lost in shadow.





MM: Do you do much preliminary work before going into a series? Like with *Excalibur*, where you have a few established characters, but most are fairly unknown. Do you do much design work before you start in on it?

ALAN: I tend not to. Most of my designs are on scraps of paper and are just doodles. Having a firm idea of who the character is is far more important than the costume detail. A character will always evolve the more that you draw it; the visuals always change as you become more comfortable with them. There's nothing you can do about that. Even

The difficult thing is when you're asked to do a cover for an issue that doesn't really have much going on. The most notable of that was the fourth *Excalibur* cover—the all-black one with the janitor. The whole issue was basically setting up a long story arc, so there wasn't a single image in that issue that would make a great cover. Because *Excalibur* had essentially humor covers, I could use the limitation as a gag (it was the first cover I wrote). *Excalibur* was the most fun I've had on covers because I was given *carte blanche*. Terry Kavanagh encouraged me and I didn't feel defensive or inhibited about pushing the envelope.

MM: Then there was the one with Psylocke and Captain Britain on the cover and you basically used it as the first page of the story.

ALAN: Yeah. I was constantly trying to think of different things to do as slightly unique covers with a humor element. Now I usually give the editor exactly what they want simply to avoid wasting time.

if you spend two or three weeks drawing the character over and over again before you start on the series, it wouldn't help, because you become more comfortable as the storyline develops and as you delve into who the

character is rather than what the character looks like. So to me, doodles that capture the essence of the character are adequate; simple is best. I think if you do a big design you tend to start trying to justify it by complicating the design.

MM: What about when you're pitching a proposal, like with *ClanDestine*? I noticed you did a few designs there.

ALAN: They were actually done well after I'd finished most of the first issue. Marvel UK decided to bring out the ashan, or more accurately an issue #0. I hadn't done any preliminary sketches other than the one that showed the family as a group. So there was nothing to go in the ashan. Paul and others of the staff went off to a publishers con in Arizona, so I was left to fake some sketches





Above: Alan drew up these two design sheets in preparation for Technet's appearance in *Excalibur*. Technet's Joy Boy was based on Mike Sekowsky's classic aliens. **Right:** Alan's ClanDestine designs were actually done after the series was already underway.

Next Page: For *Superboy's Legion* Alan took Mark Farmer's one-word summary of each character to help personalize their costumes. (Top row) "Lightning Lad and Lass were Flash Gordon inspired. Ultra Boy kept his original look, but facially there was a hint of Barry Smith's Conan. After that you have head boy, head girl, and exotic." (Bottom row) "Jock, swot [a serious student to us non-Brits], vamp, Elvis, classical, softy, religious, and tribal."

Legion of Super-Heroes™ and ©2003 DC Comics. *Excalibur*... Technet, Wallop™ and ©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.

and notes to make it look like I had a plan. [laughter]

MM: How about with *JLA: The Nail*? Since it was an Elseworlds, you were free to change the costumes as you wanted.

ALAN: With *The Nail*, all I changed was J'onn J'onzz' costume—I sort of streamlined that—and also Hawkgirl's costume. But I love the Silver Age costumes the way they were. The way that I look at it is the best creators in the business had spent decades honing those costumes to perfection, so why should I interfere?

MM: With *Superboy's Legion* you sort of come back to old costumes as well.

ALAN: Well the problem with *Superboy's Legion* was slightly different in that all of the costumes in the original series had a basic, generic design. There wasn't really any character to them. So, I asked Mark what he felt summed up each character in a one- or two-word description—swot, jock, geek, etc. Once I got that description I looked at the way the old design looked and then tried to rationalize some way to

make them seem like functional clothing of the 30th century.

MM: How involved in the storytelling aspects do you get on a book when someone else is doing the writing?

ALAN: Well, it depends on the writer. Writers don't all work in the same way; they're very, very different. Sometimes you'll get a full script where the writer details absolutely everything: all the dialogue, all the visuals. But you're on the outside of it looking in. Then you'll get

another writer who will give you a plot where you get a very strong sense of the motivations and the actions and the drama, but without any specifics, so it's much more a wedge of continuity that's visually formless. The former would be, maybe, the way that Alan Moore works, you know, with a full script. The latter being the way that Chris Claremont works,

where you get much more of a stream of consciousness which has a strong internal logic.

MM: Do you prefer working from plot-only, where you have more freedom?

ALAN: I don't mind working either way,





but it really depends on the individual. Chris Claremont put a lot of thought into his stories and characters but isn't defensive about what he's written. If you find a fault in it or find a better way, Chris sees that as being a springboard onto something else rather than getting into a confrontation. That might have more to do with personality and character.

Chris was the best writer I worked with. Nothing was ever cast in stone, the characters were allowed to evolve. It was very exciting. I certainly learned a tremendous amount about constructing a plot and telling a story. I also had a great working relationship with Mike Barr, but rather than spontaneous and free form, he was thorough. I don't know if you've seen the little eight-page Batman black-&-white story.

MM: Yes, I did. It was a very nice story.

ALAN: I think that's an absolutely perfect story. It's a shame that DC doesn't have Mike Barr writing Batman all the time.

MM: He did for several years and then he kind of... didn't.

ALAN: Yeah, it's all politics and fashion. But, yeah,

Mike knows really how to tell a story and, as I've already said, of all the writers I've worked with he is the best at visualizing the art. If he describes a panel, you can draw it a dozen different ways, but his way will always be the best.

MM: When you're writing and drawing a book, what comes first for you? How do you generally work out the story?

ALAN: It depends on whether it's a limited series or an ongoing series. When I took over on *Excalibur*, there was a definite brief that there were too many loose ends hanging and Terry wanted them tied up. Fortunately I was able to manage to tie the loose ends up so that many people thought that was the way Chris had planned it all along. That's a challenge in itself, it's like coming into a chess match halfway through and trying to pick up the game from someone else. So Chris had spun out all these loose ends without any definite goal, and I had to extend and resolve them into a satisfactory conclusion. But it was fun.

A similar thing happened when I took over on the *X-Men*. There were lots of things that had been promised and lots of things unfulfilled. In that instance,



however Mark Powers gave me lists of characters and events that had to be introduced or resolved to tie in with other titles. It was complicated because the other editors and writers didn't want to play ball. It got very messy. Working on *X-Men* was my most "professional" writing, in that I was problem-solving rather than coming up with ideas that I would have chosen.

MM: So you were given Point A and Point B and you had to figure out how to get from one to the next.

ALAN: As stylishly as possible. Or as convincingly as possible, so yeah, that was different. With *ClanDestine*, I came up with a concept that would be self-generating over a long period of time. With *The Nail*, because of it being a limited series, I thought of the idea and worked out the entire story arc, beginning, middle, and end. Once I figured how the story was going to end, it was really just a case of cutting it to fit the amount of space available. Initially I thought it would be a 64-page one-off book. There was a lot of negotiation on *The Nail*; it took about five years from beginning to end. Over the various periods either DC didn't want to do it or else they wanted to do it as a 12-part maxi-series. And I, knowing the speed that I work at, knew that I couldn't have maintained the output or spread the story across so many issues without it starting to feel padded. So when we settled on it being three issues, I had to start thinking of how the story would evolve. The second issue was a problem because, obviously, in comics you need to have a cliffhanger at the end of each issue. With *The Nail*, the first issue was very easy—Batman kills the Joker. But there was no cliffhanger for the second issue, so I had to manufacture one and somehow make it work within the context of the story. I came up with the idea for the Starro-shaped Krypto at 3:30 a.m. After a night's sleep, I thought, "This is going to be the cheesiest thing that anyone's ever seen." [laughter] I faxed a sketch to Mark Farmer and said, "This is going to be terrible, isn't it?" But Mark thought it worked and backed me up on it. I don't know what I'd have done if he hadn't. It was purely a problem of fitting the story into the comic format.

MM: When you thumbnail stories out do you have it mapped out in your mind before you start or do you just start and follow where it leads?

ALAN: It depends on the length of the story. Having started in British comics, most of the stories were between five and eight pages long. I find that I can hold five-to-eight pages in my head. I can work the whole story out and sort of visualize it in one scan. In fact I can get up to maybe 11 or 12 pages in my head, but after that when I focus on the 13th page the first one is gone. So what I tend to do is work in sequences—and most stories break down into a number of sequences depending on how it's been divided into chapters

Previous Page: The thumbnails for this black-&-white Batman story were drawn on the equivalent of legal-sized paper divided into quarters.

Below: The original pencils of *JLA: The Nail* #2, page 10. Alan redrew the page because he wasn't happy with the pacing.

Amazo, Batman, Flash™ and ©2003 DC Comics.





in the issue—whether they're formal chapters or just scenes divided by vignettes and subplots. I tend to focus on small chunks in specific ways, but see the story as an overview in the plotting stage. Once you've got the plot worked out and you know what the beginning, middle, and end is, you can loose focus on that and concentrate on the specifics and trust the fact that you've got the plot sorted and don't deviate from that.

MM: When you thumbnail, are you going sequentially or are you jumping around to do specific scenes first?

ALAN: I always go sequentially, but I've got a good idea of what's going on in each scene so I know how one scene affects another. I won't do one scene out of context for fear of just breaking the story in my mind. I'm very chronological in the way that I approach it. When you talk about thumbnails, there're different types.

MM: I know you'll sometimes take an 8-1/2" x 11" sheet of paper and divide it into four panels with each panel being a page.

ALAN: That's the way that most people learned from the Neal Adams art treasuries. He obviously did incredibly tight thumbnails. And I think they're a great way to work out the composition on covers and splash pages and pages that are maybe two or three panels. But for me they're counterproductive on a six-to-eight panel page. The tight thumbnails work for large visuals because it's easier to maintain the proportions when the entire page is continuously in sight. Pages with six or more panels are too crowded to work out in tight thumbnails, especially with a group book like *Excalibur*, *ClanDestine*, or *The Nail*. The best that can be achieved with thumbnails for a group book is to pace the narrative flow. When you're doing that there's no need for anything more than loose thumbnails with matchstick men and smiley faces and angry faces just to get the pacing.

Most times what I tend to do is work on a rough sheet which is the same size as the artboard. I work out very frenetic pencils—I scribble and scribble until I see something coming.

MM: Are you looking more for shapes and gestures at that point?

ALAN: Yeah, the general composition, some sort of energy to the characters, to the movements. Gestures are only part of it. Body language is holistic—one thing on its own isn't the whole story. The position of the stance and the position of the head on the shoulders, they all say something. When I was talking about the big foot stuff—the cartooning approach—the idea of trying to get not only the facial expression and the gesture of the hand to say what's going on with the figure, but also the attitude of the body and the way

the characters are positioned in relationship to each other. You can work that out best in a cartoonish way and then apply surface reality to it. It's much easier than trying to draw a realistic figure and then trying to add animation to it.

So when I start penciling it's very, very loose and frenetic, it's not like *Tom and Jerry* or *The Simpsons*, but it's got the same sort of attitude. Everything is very exaggerated, then when I come to tightening up I pull back and reduce the amount of exaggeration but hopefully maintain the consistency of the characterization and strength of emotion.

MM: You mentioned earlier that the *Monkey* stories had a big influence on your storytelling. How so? What about those stories affects the way you write?

ALAN: When I was younger it was a revelation in understanding how a story works. I think I mentioned before that Barry Smith's *Conan* also had an effect on me in really understanding how characterization through action worked. When you're being entertained—when you're sitting watching a movie or reading a comic—you take in most of the information in a subliminal way, so that you feel like you've discovered it, that the artist or creators didn't really have too much to do with it. You aren't aware of the craft that it takes to put it there. When it's done well it's less noticeable; the best actors don't appear to be acting. If

work to create tensions. Not just the tension between good and evil which most people are familiar with, but in a family or group. With the *Fantastic Four* you've got three male characters: one being the mature boffin, the other being a slightly less mature and physical type of person; and then the last being a hot-headed youth. In a way, you've got the three ages of man, and you have strong interactions because of the contrast of these elements. Well with *Monkey* the stories are far richer—they're funny, dramatic, philosophical, and they're constructed in such a way as to have a simple moral, like a fable. But this is an aspect of the stories that needs to be unearthed because, at first glance, they are lightweight adventure yarns for children.

What influenced me most in my attitudes towards storytelling was the relationship of the four characters who are thrown together and

sent on a religious pilgrimage to India. They are all sharply defined individuals who contrast and counter each other. *Monkey* is primarily motivated by insatiable curiosity; *Tripitaka* by blind religious faith; *Pigsy* by



Previous Page: From rough sketch to finished pencils. A page from *Avengers* #43.

Left: This tier of panels from Barry Smith's run on *Conan* had a profound effect on Alan's storytelling sensibilities.

Above: A bit more than a personality conflict is going on in this sketch for an *Essential Fantastic Four* cover.

Avengers, *Fantastic Four*™ and ©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc. *Conan*™ and ©2003 Robert E. Howard Estate.



you do realize the actor's acting, you're pulled out of the narrative and you no longer believe in it; you exit the story.

So on one level it was discovering things like that, but on another level it was understanding the way the mix of characters



MM: The story you did in *Excalibur* with Galactus and Phoenix—was that a story you feel particularly proud of?

ALAN: It was a different type of story for me to write. I'd had the idea and it was one of those instances where I was pursuing the story. The events were leading in a logical way and were developing in a way that I hadn't anticipated. It became logical for the Phoenix to come up against some cosmic entity and Galactus was the logical choice. The story really just developed like that. I felt that I had achieved something which surprised me because I hadn't set out to do it. One thing that did happen was when my father read it, he said to me, "I knew they were letting you write the book, but I didn't know you could do it." [laughter] Which is about the nearest as I get to a compliment from my dad. [laughter]

MM: Did that give you extra confidence in your writing ability? Did that give you the impetus to go out and do *ClanDestine*?

ALAN: Not really. When it came time to do *ClanDestine*, it was really that I thought that I'd done everything I could do on *Excalibur*, and there were other sorts of tensions—other political things going on at Marvel that made me think, "I really need to get away from this for a while." I really had decided to quit from *Excalibur* much earlier when I had my first break from writing it, but Terry

Kavanagh convinced me to go back—it was so much more fun working with him because he was so positive. He made me more enthusiastic about what I was creating, because when I sent him in a plot, rather than getting the usual editorial, "Yeah, go ahead, it's great, it's fine," he had analyzed the story and was actually enthusiastic about specific elements. That really spurred me on. When I decided it was time to move on, Marvel UK wasn't my first choice. I was offered assignments by different companies, usually to take over an existing book and do something similar to what I'd done on *Excalibur*. Marvel UK was different because Paul Neary was there. I approached him saying, "I can get more money from

these other companies, but what I really want at this point is creative freedom. Because I've maybe proved that I can write a pre-existing comic, but I haven't really proved that I can make something from scratch, and I don't want to have a committee looking over my shoulder and pushing me around." The deal with Marvel UK was I didn't get paid nearly as much as if I'd gone to Marvel or DC or Image, but nothing would be changed—except maybe the odd bit of punctuation, because grammar isn't my strongest suit.

MM: Do you feel like you've gotten a similar amount of freedom with the *Killraven* project?

ALAN: I've had tremendous freedom with *Killraven*; it's been





Above: These thumbnails are from an 8-page *ClanDestine* teaser from *Marvel Comics Presents* #158. They were drawn on a 12" x 18" sheet divided into eight panels.

Next Page: Alan drew these cover roughs to *Killraven* #1-4 on a 8 1/2" x 11" sheet divided into quarters.

ClanDestine, *Killraven*™ and ©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.

remarkable. I've sent in plots and then finished pages to Tom Brevoort and he's sort of greenlighted everything as I've gone along.

MM: So do you feel you've now proven yourself in that regard and that you'll be allowed that freedom in the future?

ALAN: I don't know. I tend to try to not think too much ahead on the future of comics the way things are at the moment.

MM: How did you approach *Killraven*?

ALAN: Well, I can't say I was really sold on the *Killraven* character as he had been, but I saw the unrealized potential in the character and the concept. I liked the P. Craig Russell art and the basic post-invasion, sword-against-science scenario, but the series had always been a muddle of false starts.

MM: Right. It changed directions a couple of times.

ALAN: It was really a character in search of a genre. Some stories aspired to serious sf and others were sub-Conan or super-hero in nature. I stuck with it in the hope that something good may come along, but my favorite had always been the first ten pages of "Killraven" in his first appearance in *Amazing Adventures* #18. Those are the ten pages of Neal Adams art. They really fired my imagination and I was stunned/horrified/enraged by the sudden change halfway through the issue. I was 16 or 17 at the time, and in my indignant rage I was confident that I could have written and drawn better. So I'd given *Killraven* some thought in my teens, but when Bob offered me the assignment it was no longer theoretical. My first thought was to maybe do a sort of "Killraven: Year One"—a prequel to his first appearance. But I soon decided that because I'd always hated the way the Martians had been represented that it should really be a clean start. Bob and Ski were okay with

that—doing a clean, sort of Elseworlds, new start. The next consideration for me was the storytelling. When I've said to you about my interest in John Carter, it was really the Edgar Rice Burroughs approach to character and plot through action that I'm most interested in.

MM: The pacing is a bit different than the standard comic.

ALAN: Right, because of the limited appeal of sci-fi in comic form, and the desperate need for any new audiences in the face of declining comic sales, part of my *Killraven* proposal was to construct the story after the European model so the comics could be repackaged as a graphic novel. A true graphic novel that would read like a single story rather than as a collection of comics. This was occurring in 1997 and most graphic novels at the time were, and many still are, very patchwork because the narrative flow is interrupted by the formulaic opening splash and cliffhanger ending 22 pages later, usually with a recap splash of the cliffhanger from the following issue's title page. This might seem like a minor consideration, but I believe that non-comic readers have prejudices based on the superficial appearance and accessibility of comics. The thin pamphlet nature of comics is one consideration. Captions, narrative and text, speech and thought balloons, which are all recognized as necessary sophistication by comic readers are another. They can really confuse anyone not comfortable with the medium. I broke the *Killraven* story into 17 chapters across six 22-page issues for a number of reasons. The main reason was to have a structure that allowed for a really compact and fast-paced E.R.B.-style story. Another was to disguise the cliffhangers and other comic book conventions like the story titles or credit boxes—however, so much time had elapsed while I was planning all of this that Marvel had begun to print a "Previously" page at the start of each issue and the gaps I left for indicia in *Killraven*,

at the start of each issue, look a little peculiar. Something that I'd already done with both *ClamDestiny* and *The Nail* was to plot the issues so that the final page of one issue and the splash page of the next didn't repeat each other, hopefully making the narrative flow as seamlessly as possible. Anyway, this was all in the proposal I sent to Bob Harris in '97 and he accepted it. A short time later Tom Brevoort was assigned as the editor, but then everything was put on hold.

MM: Given the long gaps over the five-year period you were working on *Killraven*, were you having to go back and reread what you had done before continuing on?





Above: Alan's initial cover concept to *X-Men/ClanDestine* #1—drawn in marker—was rejected.

Right: Rough pencils to a cover of *X-Men's* Greatest.

Next Page: A 1-page story written and drawn by Alan for *Strip Aids*, an AIDS benefit book. And just in case you can't read it, "This cover is respectfully dedicated to Adam Hughes with [fondled mummies'] is crossed out] fondest memories of Glasgow Con."

ClanDestine, Excalibur, X-Men™ and ©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.

ALAN: Definitely, yeah. Definitely, it was very strange.

MM: Did you see things and say, "That doesn't feel right any more"? Did you find yourself changing things?

ALAN: You've obviously been talking to Mark about my predilection for changing things. [laughter]

MM: Actually, we didn't talk about that.

ALAN: You didn't?

MM: No, I don't think so.

ALAN: It's usually the first thing he tells anybody. [laughter]

MM: He might have mentioned something, actually.

ALAN: I change things all the time. I'll even change artwork when it's returned after it's been printed.

MM: Really?

ALAN: If I see something that I've done wrong in the artwork, to me the real joy is figuring out how to do it right so that next time I don't do it wrong. I know that I'm not very professional about the way

I approach comics. There've been times—and there still are times—when I do a strictly commercial job—I don't mean I consciously drop my standards, but I have to modify the way I work to the deadlines and restrictions imposed by the publisher. I prefer to give myself plenty of time to work on any job so I can enjoy the creative process. Sometimes when I finish a page—or maybe a day or so later—with a fresh eye I can see where I went wrong or see a better way. That's what I enjoy most about working in comics, feeling that I've learned something in the process rather than just churning out pages on auto-pilot.

MM: Do you try to take what you learn in one project and build on it in the next?

ALAN: I would like to think so. I try to pick things that will challenge me in some way or another. Not only in the art, but in the storytelling. I see the two things as being inseparable. To me the writing and artwork together transmit the story and should be subordinate to the story. How best to accomplish this differs in every instance. That is what is fascinating about the storytelling craft. These are abstracts, so you never really know how successful you've been until a few years have gone past. It's impossible to be objective about your own work while you're working on it, or even shortly after having finished it.



MM: You're basically trying to write something you would enjoy reading.

ALAN: Always. To me the real strength of the comic artform is that the potential is only limited by the creator's imagination and dedication. I've got no interest in text-paced stories; they feel to me like bad soaps written by frustrated screenwriters. It usually results in the artist rubber-stamping imagery in the belief that cinematic pacing is creating reality. While it can be effective in certain instances, entire issues of cinematic pacing just bore me. I want to do comics that are big block-busters—the comics equivalent of a big special effects epic. And they can be illustrated with sometimes less effort than a contained, calm domestic story.

MM: You probably find that's easier to draw than a talking heads scene where you have to create visual interest where there's not much going on.

ALAN: Exactly.

MM: You do such great facial expressions—do you use reference for your faces?

ALAN: As I attempt to make a cartoony rough more realistic, I have to rationalize it and sometimes I need a reference if it's something that's anatomically weird or with unusual lighting.

MM: Do you not use reference that much then?

ALAN: I tend not to use reference directly. I'm more of a confectionalist. I'll study people, animals, objects, and try to learn how to draw them without the reference. To me, that's the way that my artwork is the freshest. If I copy a photograph it looks dead. I think there are very, very few artists who can copy a photograph and make it look like it has any life to it. Adam Hughes and Alex Ross can. They have a real gift for using photographic reference but somehow adding a fluidity and sense of life to their art. The sad thing is, many lesser artists have jumped on the bandwagon and slavishly trace photographs without method or



purpose, let alone with a fraction of Adam and Alex's skill or intent. I hope it is just another turn of the wheel of fashion, because the next logical step is to print photos and lose the artist.

There have always been cartoon and photo-referenced styles of comic art, but super-hero comic art—like jazz music—is a uniquely American creation and it is the form I prefer.

MM: Do you look outside of comics for art-work?

ALAN: Oh, yeah, of course. But linework is a unique branch of art and I think that many people who work in comics are a bit blasé about it, because it's quite a brutish artform. There's very little subtlety. But that's also its strength—like heavy metal music. It's possible to follow the evolution of line art from ancient pictograms through the likes of, say, Aubrey Beardsley, Alphonse Mucha, and Egon

Schiele to modern comics. But real style is an unconscious product of an artist's personality. Like graphology, it is a result of the shortcuts and errors in an artist's approach. What is right is often ignored. Most people imitate the errors without the underlying, well-informed framework. Likewise, photo-referenced art might look superficially realistic, but it lacks what cartoony art can capture—emotion, character, and dynamic potential. Cartooning—big foot art—is all about distilling the essence of movement and expression. So that even a character in repose is alive with potential.

MM: So between the two, you would prefer, say in classic terms, a Will Eisner to a Wally Wood.

ALAN: Oh, no, I like both of them for different reasons. The same is true for many artists. With Gil Kane you had grace and structure; with Buscema you had power and theatricality; with Ditko you had movement and mood; with Nestor Redondo you had romance and spirit; and with Neal Adams you've got little bits of everything. He was one of the first who started pulling lots of things together. Most artists focus on defining a certain band of characteristics. Anyone who thinks a particular artist's style is original is really just ignorant of the artist's influences. "Everything is new tomorrow." The crucial thing is, comics are more than putting a stream of text and art into a sequential framework. The text and art are the medium, not the message. A great illustrator won't necessarily be a great comic artist. Neal Adams is a great storyteller as well as a phenomenal artist. His skill and craft as an artist don't make him a great storyteller, it merely allows him to interpret his

stories with a freedom and scope that is beyond lesser artists. This is true of all of the best comic artists to varying degrees. Learning to draw more effectively gives an artist a greater choice in the types of stories and a flexibility in how to interpret them. An artist with limited ability will be limited in his options, even if he is a good storyteller. It takes a peculiar mix of skills to make a really good comic artist.

MM: Would you like to do more stories outside the super-hero genre?

ALAN: I like science-fiction. I like escapist fantasy.

Kitchen sink, domestic stuff just bores me, I'm not really interested. I'll leave that to people who are more interested in trying to be real.

MM: If you had to call yourself something, would you call yourself an artist, a cartoonist, a storyteller...?

ALAN: I would refer to myself as a storyteller. I don't really care what anyone else calls me as a job description, whether it's an artist or a cartoonist. For my own pigeon-holing I see the most important thing as being the fact that I illustrate stories. The story always comes first; the art is secondary. In the past I've had a lot of people—primarily collectors and art

dealers—asking why don't I draw more splash pages; why do I do so many six- and seven-panel pages. It's because you need the density of incidents. To tell a good story in a few pages, you need a lot of panels and you need a lot of information in those panels.

MM: How much do you put into your stories from life you see around you? Are you strictly manufacturing fantasy or are you incorporating things from real life?





Previous Page: There's really nothing to add other than to say this piece was drawn for the UKCAC.

Above: Pencils for an interior spread from *Kroken's Wake*.

Bottom: Text illustrations from *Kroken's Wake*.



ALAN: When *ClanDestine* came out a lot of people made note of the fact that my son, Thomas, and daughter, Pauline—although they're not twins—were around the same age as Rory and Pandora are meant to be and that I wrote about a family and I'm very close to my family. You write about what you know. Although I don't sit down and consciously copy reality—sketch book in hand—I'm pretty good at memorizing things, taking little snapshots as I'm walking around looking at things, watching the way people gesture, the way they sit around.

MM: I've noticed a large number of the best artists have sort of photographic memories.

ALAN: I wouldn't say I've got a photo-

graphic memory. There're a few people who claim to have a photographic memory and it's basically a sheet of tracing paper. [laughter] But I think that we all have to have the capacity to store visual information. Being able to access it is the trick. Analyzing the essentials is the first principle.

MM: For the last few years you've been doing mini-series or short story-arcs. Is that the direction you're going in or is there the possibility of doing a longer series?

ALAN: I really don't know. There's quite a lot of things that give me concerns about getting involved in a long-term project. One thing is if I were to do a regular 12-issue-a-year book, I couldn't write it myself, I'd have to work with a writer. There's also the type of stories I want to tell. I've been really spoiled over the past few years—able to pick and choose what I want to do, but I don't know how much longer that will last. I'm a traditionalist. I started working in American comics when DC and Marvel still maintained their House Styles and continuity in story and art was expected. I don't have any burning urge to revolutionize the comic form or to do my "unique" version of any character. That kind of thing might generate interest among some critical elite, but it makes me wonder who is being entertained. I believe that comic stories with a predominantly cerebral content would be better suited in a novel. I find slow, repetitious art redundant. I want to produce fun comics that can be read by teenagers or adults who are prepared to suspend their disbelief. I hope I can continue to do that... at least until retirement age. For choice, I'd rather not find out if drawing really is the only thing I am any good at.

One final note. I approached this project with extreme caution and suspicion, but the experience actually proved to be enlightening and fun, thanks entirely to Eric's professionalism, courtesy, and determination to get it right. Many thanks, Eric.



Below: Thumbnails from the *Spider-Man* Movie Adaptation (pages 1-3).

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Alan Davis



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Art Gallery





Previous Pages: (Clockwise from top left) Telly Sevalis as the Crimson Dynamo, Kirk Douglas as Daredevil, Dennis Collins as Starlord, and British comedy duo Morecomb and Wise as the Dynamic Duo, all for Mike Conroy's fanzine, *Fantasy Forum*. Warlock gets the center square in another drawing from Alan's fanzine days. **Left:** A panel from "Dragon Slayer," Alan's first completed strip, circa 1978.

Lower Left: This cover—Alan's second for Marvel UK—was rejected. It was later used as the cover for *Fantasy Forum* #17 in 1982.

Below: Image used for the cover of *The Complete D.R. & Quinch* released through Titan Books.

Batman, Robin TM and ©2003 DC Comics.
Black Panther, Crimson Dynamo, Daredevil,
Starlord, Warlock TM and ©2003 Marvel
Characters, Inc. D.R. & Quinch TM and ©2003
2000 A.D.





Left: Pencils to the cover of the UK edition of "Batman: Year Two."

Below: UKCAC convention drawings.

Batman, Catwoman, Joker TM and ©2003 DC Comics.



Artwork ©2003 Alan Davis and Paul Neary.





Top: This Lance McLane strip served as an inspiration for a panel in *Excalibur* #61 (shown at left). Alan: "I have occasionally included little 'in-jokes/tributes/swipes' to the creators who inspired me. The shot of the planet shadow, from Lance McLane had always impressed me with its powerful simplicity. Paul Neary later told me that he and Syd Jordan had worked on this strip late one night holding tennis balls over a desk lamp to figure out how the planetary shadow would look. This was long before the Hubble telescope and high resolution space photography."

Lower Left: Another postcard image Alan sent in reply to fanmail.

Excalibur, *Nightcrawler*, *Phoenix*™ and ©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc. Lance McLane™ and ©2003 respective owner.





Maze Agency ©2003 Mike Barr.

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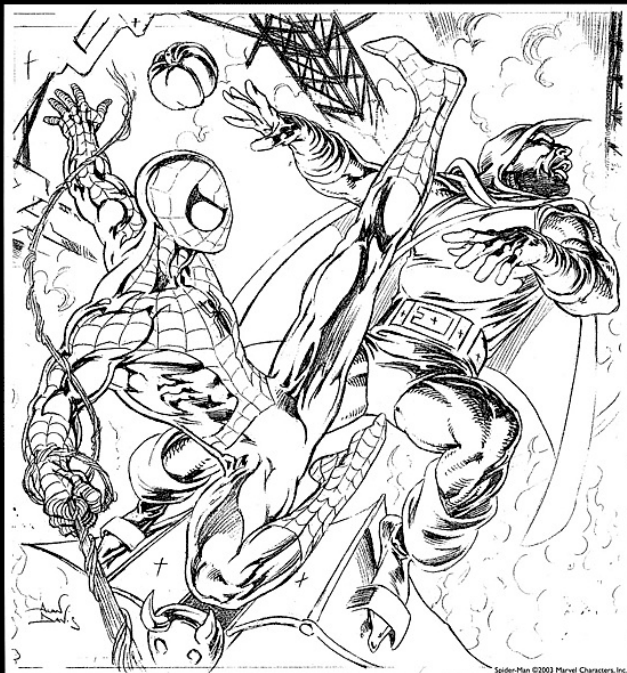


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Left: A 2-page spread from WildCATs Sourcebook.

Below: Pencils from the unpublished WildCATs: Year One.

Right: This full-page splash shows Zealot in a flashback to the Bronze Age that was intended for the never-published WildCATs: Year One mini-series. Inks by Mark Farmer.

Griffin/WildCATs™ and ©2003 Wildstorm Productions.







Above: This page from Excalibur #54 is the "only favorite page" of Alan's wife, Heather. And they lived happily ever after....

Afterword

As Alan's closest, and by now longest, collaborator you'd expect me to have some deep insight as to what makes the man tick. Some arcane clue concerning his pursuit of the perfect comic (almost certainly never to be attained, yet constantly sought)... the phenomenal speed at which he works, his talent for spotting (and knowing how to correct) the flaws in any script he reads or how he makes the job of anyone working with him so much easier. Basically his sheer professionalism. Well I'm sorry to disappoint y'all but the process is just as mysterious and delightful to me as it is to everyone else.

In any inker/penciler partnership, the inker always takes the subservient role... riding, if you will, on the coat-tail of the penciler's success and ability. No fan buys a comic because of an inker's involvement and the credit and page rates we receive reflect this. This leaves the inker's fate very much in the hands of the penciler and I've always worked on the principle that if the penciler knows what he's doing, and if I aim to please him, then the finished product should be worthwhile. Some people I've worked with in the past have exploited this relationship with specious praise and hollow guarantees. Not so Alan. He's never promised me anything that he didn't deliver and rarely praises what I do to his pencils (something I take, perhaps mistakenly, as an unspoken compliment). He treats me as a valued contributor and emphasizes to everyone that we work as a team. Thanks to his loyalty I've had the pleasure of working on ventures that electrify and stimulate, inspire and intimidate (followed fleetingly by a tiny feeling of satisfaction that I've done my part in the comic producing process to the best of my ability before swiftly moving on). By the same token we've been there as sounding boards for each other's ideas and opinions, and as shoulders for one another to cry on when it feels like the whole world is against us, something that happens with frightening frequency I'm afraid. The comics business can be a lonely place... a trust-worthy partner, a Godsend.

I guess the only real difference between me and almost everyone else on the planet is that I get the

pleasure of opening a package of artwork from Alan and seeing his pencils in their pristine form before I start messing with them (and let's face it, every penciler who is unwilling/unable to ink his own work has to accept that the work will be altered to some degree by the inker).

I've no idea what format the book you've just finished reading has taken, but two things are certain. One is that it will have been lavishly illustrated and the other is that if Alan has contributed dialogue anywhere along the way he will have mentioned storytelling. It's plain to see that he can draw the socks off almost anyone, and thankfully we see that on every page he produces, but there are more times when the chance to "impress" with an exotic page layout or full page action scene are sacrificed for the greater good of the story. It took me some time to see beyond his skill with a pencil and realise that what really draws you into his world is the storytelling, the powerful combination of layouts, mood, pacing and tremendous characterization. Alan's is a universe populated with people whose bodies stay in proportion, move in believable ways even in moments of extreme action and whose faces convey the widest range of expressions and emotions imaginable. Individuals presented so accurately that you can actually "hear" the words they speak. Monsters and aliens so convincingly designed that you can almost smell them... feel their movements as they briefly pass through our comic-enriched lives. His creations, good or evil, behave consistently and speak concise dialogue in clear tones. No gimmicks, his stories simply entertain and excite.

Sure, it's hard work keeping to the standards Alan sets, but at the end of the day it's far more satisfying than simply churning out pages the penciler has just filled with "stuff." How our working relationship will end, I haven't a clue. Death, a blazing row, retirement, alien invasion... who knows? ...The one irrefutable fact is that until that time arrives, his coat-tails are one hell of a place to be.

Mark Farmer
England, 2002

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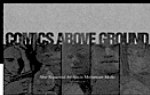
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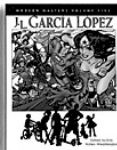
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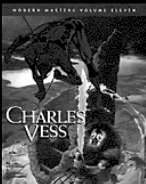
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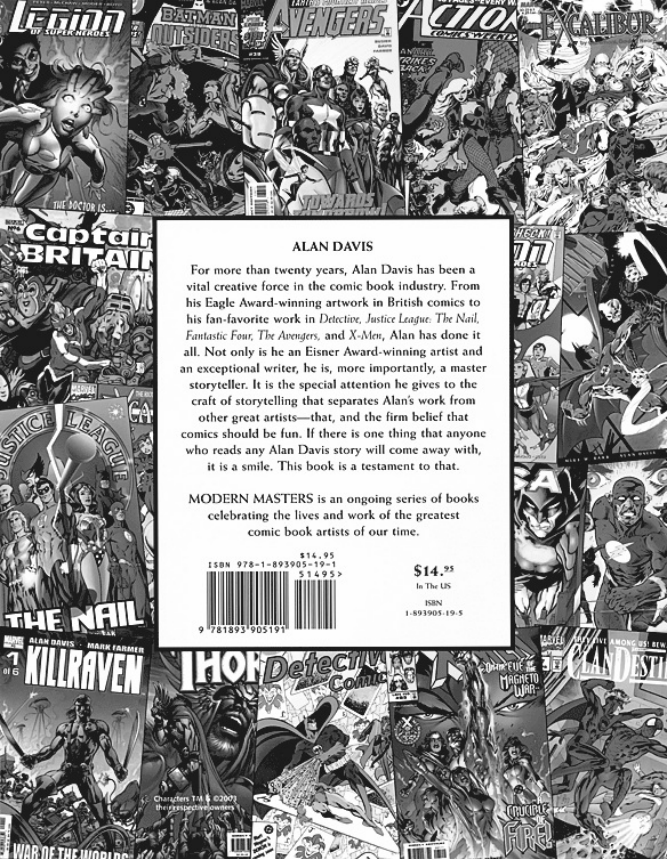
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